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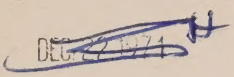

EIGHT O'CLOCK
AND OTHER STUDIES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MIXED MARRIAGE

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

THE MAGNANIMOUS LOVER

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

EIGHT O'CLOCK
AND OTHER STUDIES
BY ST. JOHN G. ERVINE

WITHDRAWN
☐ DESELECTED
☐ LOST
☐ DAMAGED
☐ MISSING (INV.)
☐ OTHER

THE MACMILLAN CO.
NEW YORK
1915

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UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK
IN SAINT JOHN

TO

LENNOX ROBINSON

Some of these studies were published in the *Nation*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Daily News*, *Sunday Chronicle*, *Odd Volume*, the *New Statesman*, and the *Irish Independent*. I am indebted to the Editors of these journals for permission to print them here.

ST. J. G. E.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
EIGHT O'CLOCK	11
CLUTIE JOHN	18
THE WELL OF YOUTH	24
AMBITION	31
THE BLIND MAN	36
COLLEAGUES	42
RETIREMENT	51
THE REVELATION	60
THE FOOL	67
CRISIS	73
THE MATCH	81
DERELICTS	87
ADVENTURE	92
DISCONTENT	99
COMPARISON	105
THE BURIAL	111
SAFETY	118

EIGHT O'CLOCK

A WOMAN A GIRL
A CHILD

It is the dark part of a morning in February: in a little while the sun will break through the blackness and a grey light will creep through the window of the living-room in a small house in South London, where a WOMAN, *aged beyond her years, which are thirty-three, is kneeling at a chair. Her hands are clenched together, and her eyes are fixed intently on the sky. Her lips move slowly and regularly, and sometimes she cries out, "Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!" There is no other sound in the room, save the ticking of a clock. There is silence, and* THE WOMAN, *beating her hands together, cries out again, "Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!" The door opens, and a* GIRL, *whose age is twenty-two, enters, feeling her way in the dark.*

THE GIRL. Are you there, Jenny?
THE WOMAN. Oh, God! Oh, God!
THE GIRL. Jenny!

THE WOMAN. Oh, God!

[THE GIRL *reaches* THE WOMAN *and kneels down beside her.*

THE GIRL. Don't, Jenny!

THE WOMAN. Oh!

THE GIRL. It's me! Lizzie! Your sister, Jenny! I'm with you, dear. Don't take on so! It's—it's all for the best!

[THE GIRL'S *voice breaks, and she sobs.*

THE WOMAN. They'll do it! I know they will! There's no mercy!

THE GIRL. It's hard on you!

THE WOMAN. They don't think of me! [*They are silent for a few moments.*] What's the time?

[THE GIRL *gets up from her knees and feels her way towards the fireplace.*

THE GIRL. It's too dark—I can't see the clock.

THE WOMAN. Strike a match and see.

[THE GIRL *strikes a match and looks at the clock.*

THE GIRL. It's just after seven o'clock.

THE WOMAN [*burying her face in her hands*]. Oh, God! Oh, God!

THE GIRL. Sometimes they're saved at the last minute.

[THE WOMAN *does not reply. She sways before the chair and moans piteously. Neither speaks.* THE GIRL *stands in the centre of the room indeterminately; then she breaks out passionately.*

THE GIRL. Oh, they won't do it! It 'ud be wicked of them to do it! He never meant any harm. It was the drink.

THE WOMAN. There never was a better man when he was sober—wouldn't hurt any one!

THE GIRL. They ought to make allowances! He was sorry after he done it.

THE WOMAN. They never make allowances!

THE GIRL. The people signed a petition for him. *His* wife signed it, too! If she could forgive, why can't they?

THE WOMAN. They never forgive.

THE GIRL. They can't take no notice of the petition. The clergyman signed it. And the Mayor . . .

THE WOMAN. They'll do it—oh, they'll do it!

THE GIRL. It was in anger he done it; and they're not angry. He didn't know what he was doing; and they do. Oh, it's wicked, it's wicked! It ought not to be allowed!

THE WOMAN. Oh! Oh! Oh!

THE GIRL. Why doesn't some one tell them?

THE WOMAN. They wouldn't listen. [*She holds up her hand towards the darkness.*] Oh, God, make them listen! Stop them, oh, God! Soften their hearts!

[*A* CHILD'S *voice is heard outside the room.*

THE CHILD. Mother!

THE WOMAN. They have no hearts to soften!

THE CHILD. Mother!

THE GIRL. There's Maggie calling you.

[THE WOMAN *cries convulsively.*

THE CHILD. Mother!

THE GIRL. What is it, dear?

[*She opens the door, and* THE CHILD, *in her nightdress, is seen standing in the doorway.*

THE CHILD. Is Daddy hanged yet, Aunt Lizzie?

[THE GIRL *gathers* THE CHILD *up in her arms and stops her mouth with hysterical kisses.*

THE CHILD. You said he'd be hanged to-day, Aunt Lizzie. Is it time yet?

THE WOMAN. Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!

THE GIRL. Don't, dearie, don't say that!

THE CHILD. It's so dark! Will it hurt him, Aunt Lizzie?

THE GIRL. Don't, don't!

[THE CHILD *climbs out of* THE GIRL'S *arms and goes to her mother.*

THE CHILD. Is he hanged yet, mother?

THE WOMAN. No, dear.

THE CHILD. Aren't they going to, mother? You said they would hang him in the morning, and it's the morning now. It is the morning, isn't it?

THE WOMAN. Oh!

THE GIRL. Mebbe they'll let him off, dear.

THE CHILD. No, they won't! I heard a man say Daddy'd be finished to-day! He said I'd be an orphan to-morrow, and it's to-morrow now! Isn't it?

THE GIRL. Yes, dear.

[*It has become lighter and* THE WOMAN *and* THE GIRL *and* THE CHILD *are more distinctly seen.*

THE CHILD. He did that, and a boy laughed.

[*She makes the motion of a rope being tied round the throat, and puts out her tongue in the manner of the strangled.*

THE GIRL. You shouldn't listen to them.

THE CHILD. Will it be long before he's hanged ?

THE GIRL. Don't talk like that, dearie !

THE CHILD. Will it be long ?

THE GIRL. Not long, dear.

THE CHILD. What time will they hang him ?

THE WOMAN. Oh ! Oh ! Oh !

THE GIRL. Don't, dear ! Your poor mother ! Go to bed like a good girl !

THE CHILD. I want to stay till Daddy is . . .

THE GIRL. Oh, don't, don't, don't !

THE CHILD [*whimpering*]. I don't want to go to bed.

THE WOMAN. Give her to me.

[THE GIRL *takes* THE CHILD *in her arms and carries her to* THE WOMAN. THE CHILD *kneels beside her mother, who puts her arm round her and buries her face in her hair.*

THE CHILD. It's getting light, mother !

THE WOMAN. What's the time ?

THE GIRL. It's a quarter to eight. [*Her voice is dry and hard.*]

THE WOMAN. A quarter to! Oh! Oh! Oh!

[THE WOMAN *sobs.* THE CHILD *fondles her, but, obtaining no response, whimpers vaguely.* THE GIRL *stands passively by the fireplace. There is silence for a little while.*

THE GIRL. They'll be ready now.

THE WOMAN. What's that?

THE GIRL. They'll be making preparations. . . .

THE WOMAN. Oh!

THE GIRL. I saw a picture of it once. . . . They strap their arms and legs. . . .

THE CHILD. Will it hurt him, Aunt Lizzie?

THE GIRL. I wonder what he feels like!

THE CHILD. Aunt Lizzie, will it hurt him?

THE GIRL. They'll be standing round him—gaping at him! [*She runs frantically to the window and beats her hands against the glass.*] Oh, God! God! stop it, stop it! He's only one, and they've got him tied! Give him a chance! . . .

THE WOMAN. He'll be dead soon. Oh, my man, my man!

THE CHILD. I want my father!

THE WOMAN [*clutching* THE CHILD *to her hysterically*]. You'll never see him again. It's us as has to bear it. They never think of us!

THE GIRL. It's nearly eight o'clock.

THE WOMAN. Pray for your father, dear!

THE CHILD. Yes, mother.

[THE CHILD *covers her face with her hands.*

THE GIRL. To be living now, and dead in a minute! [*Passionately.*] It's not right, it's not right! It's killing! Murder, murder!

THE WOMAN. It's the law!

THE CHILD. What'll I say, mother?

THE WOMAN. Just close your eyes, dear, and pray.

[*There is quiet in the room.* THE WOMAN *and* THE CHILD *kneel beside each other,* THE CHILD *with her face covered with her hands,* THE WOMAN *with her face buried in the chair.* THE GIRL *stands at the window, her hands strained against the glass. The dull boom of a clock is heard striking the hour of eight. At the first stroke* THE WOMAN *jumps to her feet and runs shrieking to the window.*

THE WOMAN. No, no, no, don't do it! He's a good man, he wouldn't . . . Oh! [*She falls weeping to the ground.*]

[*The clock continues to boom out the hour of eight. But for this and the choked sobs of* THE WOMAN, *there is silence. Presently both cease. There is quiet.*

THE CHILD [*uncovering her face*]. Is he hanged yet, Aunt Lizzie?

[*It becomes light.*

CLUTIE JOHN

His name was John, and he was left-handed, so he was called Clutie John. If you had guessed for a hundred years and more you would not have guessed what his occupation was. Looking at him, you might have thought that he was an agricultural labourer or a bricklayer, or any of the class of workers who are continually employed in the open, for his face had the ruddy, roughened aspect of one who is frequently beaten by wind and rain and warmed by the sun. His habits, too, would have confirmed you in your belief that he was an agricultural labourer, for he rose and retired early, and his life was conducted with the regularity that belongs not to clockwork (for which he had a mighty contempt), as men assert, but to great natural things. Watches, and all time-pieces, of whatsoever kind, were totally disregarded by him. They were vain human contrivances, no two of which could be trusted to say the same thing. The sun was his guide and counsellor: when it rose, he rose; when it set, he went to bed; it never deceived him; it

needed no regulating, it went neither slow nor fast, and it never ran down.

"Fin'in' things" was Clutie John's occupation. Do not misunderstand; he was not a policeman or a private inquiry agent or anything remotely resembling either one or the other. He would not have spied for you had you offered him any sum you can imagine as a proper reward for such service. He was a clean man and believed in minding his own business and leaving other people to mind theirs. He did not regard the offer of money as an excuse for the performance of work which was detestable. "Ye shud do a thing;" he would say, "acause ye like doin' it, not acause ye're paid t' do it! If ye wudden do a thing fur nathin' if ye cud, ye shudden do it fur pay," which was an admirable aphorism on which, strange as it may seem, he constantly acted.

His occupation literally was that of a finder of things. He went out in the morning before other men were astir, with a bag slung over his shoulders, and a pointed stick in his hand, seeking what he could find. The debris of the previous night's gathering of men and women in the street was not all rubbish; there were all sorts of trifles carelessly dropped by the people which, when picked up by Clutie John, could be turned into profit. Not all the things found were trifles; some, indeed, were of great value. There was a

packet of jewellery that he found once, the reward for which was considerable. Mostly, however, his finds were trifling in themselves. Here a sixpence, there a penny or a halfpenny, a glove, a purse (sometimes empty, sometimes not), pencils, pens, marbles, umbrellas, and what not. These things, discreetly disposed of, were the source of Clutie John's small, but regular, income.

"People is very forgetful," he would say, with a little reproach in his tone; and then, as if to make up for the reproach, he would add: "Och, well, sure they've a dale to think about, what wi' wan thing an' another, an' if they wurn't a bit forgetful, it wudden be much o' a living I'd be makin'."

He was a great friend of all the small boys in the district. This was partly in the way of business, for he sold his "marleys" to them. "Boys is more forgetful nor any one," he would say, while he pulled a number of marbles out of his pockets. "Girls is no good til me. They never furget nathin' but hairpins, an' they're har'ly worth pickin' up. Wee girls furgets nathin' at all. A wud die o' starvation if there wus nathin' but wee girls in the wurl." He would pause for a moment, and then add merrily: "They're the quare wee tories, wee girls!" which is the Irish way of saying that little girls are pleasant little rascals. Whenever a boy met Clutie John he would cry out to him familiarly,

"Ha, Clutie John!" and Clutie John would gravely reply, "Ha, wee lad!"

"Have ye anny marleys the day?" the boy would say.

"Ay, A have a brave wee lot!" Clutie John would reply.

"How many will ye give us fur a ha'penny?" and Clutie John would offer to give two or three more for a ha'penny than were given in the shops.

"It dussen matter whether A give them too manny or not," he would say, by way of excuse for his lavishness. "Sure, they'll loss them soon enough, an' A'll mebbe fin' them, an' sell them back to them again. Wee lads is the quare lossers!"

It was in this manner that Clutie John made his living. Whatever happened in the world made little difference to him, except in so far as it increased his opportunities for finding things. Public holidays, all joyful occasions, were strongly supported by him. On the morning after such days he found much that was good, with less difficulty than usual. "They hing thegither, a crowd," he would say, "an' ye fin' near all ye want wi'out shiftin' about much. They're that happy, they furget more aisily nor when they're just ordinary!" Monday morning found him making for the lovers' Sunday haunts. "Coortin' couples is very furgetful," he would say. "A make more out o' them nor A do out o' anny one

else, except mebbe the wee lads. Bits o' lace hankeys an' things that weemen likes t' have about them of a Sunday."

He always spoke of his fellows as if they were a different species of being altogether from himself. They were all "furgetful," and Clutie John never forgot anything. That in itself was sufficient to mark him out from them; but his habits of life made it difficult for him to have much intercourse of a familiar character with any particular person. He knew, and was known by, many; but of all the persons whom he knew, none could call him friend. The "wee lads" would hold his hand and endeavour to wheedle "marleys" out of him, when they were penniless, and he would send them away quite happy, although they had not succeeded in getting a single "marley" from him. Clutie John never gave anything away. Secreted in his mind was a dreadful fear that a day might come, and that quickly, when he would not be able to go out in the morning and find things, and all his life was a great effort to prepare for that time. He lived alone, and cooked his own meals; he never went to a theatre or music-hall, or a church; in a queer odd way of his own he was religious, but precisely what he believed no one knew.

He was easily moved by natural beauty; he would sniff the fresh morning air, not for reasons of health (for he hated open windows), but for the

sheer joy of feeling it in his lungs ; and the sun rising from behind the hills and casting its first chilly rays on the river always made him stand still for awhile and whistle. There were no great joys in his life and no great sorrows, his progress through the world was smooth and unexhilarating, nothing disturbed his equanimity ; an unusually large find of "marleys" excited him as little as an unusually small find, outwardly at all events, for no doubt the secret fear lurking in his mind made such things of great moment to him ; but on the surface of his life he showed as a simple, serene, almost passionless man, for whom such things as joys and griefs did not exist.

When he died, as he did suddenly, he left a considerable sum of money. It passed into the hands of the State, for he had no kin and had made no will. It was odd to think of him scraping and saving, not in the least like the conventional miser, and at the end all that he had scraped together passing from him to the community, through whose "forgetfulness" he had made his small fortune.

THE WELL OF YOUTH

MICHAEL CREGAN and I were walking through the Vale of Ovoca, when we came to St. Brigid's Well, that was gushing out of a rock. Said I: "It's the great thirst I have on me, and I'll take a drink." To which Michael replied: "Now, be aisy wi' that watter, fur sure ye don't know the harrum ye might do t' yerself."

"And what's the matter with the water?" I asked.

"Sure, don't ye know the quality of it?" was the question that he put to me in reply.

"I do not," said I.

"Aw, now, it's the good job I was wi' ye, or ye might be destroyed through yer ignerance."

"What's the matter with it, anyway?" I exclaimed.

"Did ye nivir hear tell o' the man an' his wife that drunk o' it wi'out knowin' annythin' about it? John O'Neill was his name, an' a dacent man, an' the name o' his wife was Bridget, but she wus beside herself wi' consate, an' didden like t' be called Biddy. 'Me name's Bride,' she wud say, spakin' like a publican's wife thrum Dublin."

"I never heard a word about them in my life. . . ."

"An' you been t' college an' all, wi' the larnin' o' Trinity in yer head!"

"Well, you tell me about it, for dear sake," said I, "and not be standing there making a clatter with your tongue, and me nearly dead with the drouth!"

"Sure, have yer drink, but don't take too much, an' I'll tell ye about it as sure as ye're stan'in' there."

I drank eagerly of the cool clear water that comes out of a rock and is called St. Brigid's Well; for St. Brigid, I would have you know, was as great a woman as St. Patrick was a man, and many a tale is told of her in Ireland this day that I would tell to you had I the time.

"You'll be wanting a drink yourself, mebbe?" said I to Michael when I had drunk my fill.

"I do that," said he, and ducked his head down and drank as I had done. And when he had finished we resumed our journey through the Vale of Ovoca, and he told me this tale of the man that was called O'Neill and his wife Bridget and the strange thing that befell them at the well of St. Brigid.

* * * * *

"He wus an ould man wus John O'Neill whin he come til these parts. It wus thrum the north he come, an' wus descended thrum the O'Neills

of Ulster. Manny a time ye'd be seein' somethin' in a paper about the Red Han' o' O'Neill. It wus that family he belonged til. He married a wumman quaren younger nor himself. Mebbe twenty year younger she wus, an' wus the daughter o' a man that kep' a shop in Enniskillen. Sure, she was no match fur him in blood. Her family was English an' nathin' til spake of at all. She wus the quare one fur lettin' on about herself. She wud tell ye her age was twenty-eight, an' her near double that, an' the wrinkles roun' her eyes like cart tracks in a loanin' in wet weather. But, sure, ye cudden shame the wumman an' affront her afore her own man that knew as well as she did what her age wus, an' ye cud on'y purtend ye belaved her. It's a poor thing t' be exposin' tricks that do no harrum.

" Wan day whin John O'Neill wus comin' the very way we're walkin' now, carryin' a load o' somethin' or another on his back, an' him that tired he cud har'ly walk, fur he wus near bent wi' age already, t' say nathin' o' a load as well, he come up til St. Brigid's Well, an', ses he, as ye might say yerself, ' It's a rest I'll be havin' an' a drink o' water t' drink, fur I'm that tired an' thirsty I'm fit t' drop ! ' An' wi' that he throws down his load on the groun', an', groanin' like a wheel that hassen had grease at it fur a year, he tries til straighten his back. ' Sure, I wish I

wus thirty years younger,' ses he, 'an' it's not makin' me tired a load like that wud be.' An' whin he'd had a bit o' a rest he stooped down an' tuk a drink, an' he drunk a quare lot. An' whin he stud up again ye wudden belave but he wus a young man. Thirty years wus aff his age as sure as ye're stan'in' there! 'Lord bliss me sowl!' ses he, 'this is the quare set-out! Sure, me wife'll not know me at all whin I git home!' He stretched himself, an' begun to caper about like a wil' thing. 'Ah, now,' ses he, 'issen this the quare fine thing's happened t' me? I come in here an ould man an' I'm goin' out young!'

Michael broke off in his story to comment on this. "Sure, that's the way it ought t' be, anny way, though mebbe it's the same thing whin ye come t' think o' it. Ye git quaren like a chile whin ye git ould, they say."

He proceeded with the story.

"He picked up his load, an' it wus no trouble til him at all. 'Och!' ses he, 'I cud carry a dozen loads the like o' this, an' not feel it at all!' When he got til his house, sure wussen Bridget stan'in' there, and didden know a bit o' him. She lukked at him amazed, an' ses she, 'Who are ye at all? Sure, I uset t' know somewan quaren like ye, but I can't lay me min' t' who it wus.' 'Och! don't ye know me, Bride?' ses he, caperin' about like a young goat. 'Is it me man ye are?' ses she. 'It is that!' ses he.

'Aw, glory be t' God!' ses she, 'an' what's come over ye?' 'Come on intil the house,' ses he, 'an' I'll tell ye.' They wint intil the house, an' he tould her about St. Brigid's Well, an' ses he, 'Me girl, ye're alwis purtendin' ye're twenty-eight, an' you near double that age. It's a pity ye don't go til the well an' git a drink yerself, so's ye cud be young in truth.' He hadden got the words out o' his mouth afore she jumped up and put her shawl roun' her head. 'Will ye tell me where it is,' ses she, 'an' I'll go there this minit?' 'I will, surely,' ses he, an' he give her full directions, an' as soon as she heard him, aff she wint as hard as she cud, which wussen very hard, fur she wus gettin' stout in her ould age an' wussen althegither firm on her feet. Whin she'd gone, John O'Neill sut down in the house afore the fire an' lit his pipe, til wait fur her comin' back. He waited an' waited, but she wus the quare long time comin'. 'She oughta be back be this time,' ses he. 'Sure, it's not as far as that.'

"He was beginnin' til git a bit onaisy, an' he kep' on goin' til the dure til see if she wus comin', but there wussen a sign o' her annywhere. It wus beginnin' til git dark, an' so he walked a bit o' the way til meet her, but not a bit o' her did he see. 'Now, issen it provokin',' ses he, 'the way that wumman carries on? Sure, she cud ha' bin there an' back twice over if she'd liked.

I suppose I'll have t' go after her, an' see what's become o' her. An' whin I'm there I may as well take another drop o' the blessed watter.'

" He walked on an' on, an' as he walked it got darker and darker. ' It's hard til fin' yer way in the dark nights,' ses he, ' whin ye're a stranger in a district. I hope no harrum's come til her. . . .' After a while he come til the Vale o' Ovoca, an' not a sign o' his wife cud he see annywhere. He wus in a tarr'ble state. ' Dear-a-dear,' ses he, ' what'll I do wi'out me wumman ! ' An' wi' that he comes up til the well, an' as soon as he got there he heard somone cryin', an' goin' up, he saw a babby that wus cryin' its eyes out.

" ' What ails ye ? ' ses he.

" ' D'ye not know me ? ' ses the chile.

" ' I do not, indeed,' ses he ; ' an' it's the strange thing til hear a chile talkin' like a grown wumman ! '

" ' Sure, I'm yer wife ! ' ses the chile.

" ' Ye're me what ? ' ses he.

" ' I'm yer wife,' ses she.

" ' Holy Murdher ! ' ses he, ' what's happened till ye at all ? '

" ' I did what ye tould me,' ses she. ' I come here an' drunk the watter, an' felt meself gittin' younger, an' it was that fine a feelin' til be young again that I furgot til stap, an' I tuk too much ! ' "

* * * * *

Michael and I came out of the Vale of Ovoca

together, and parted company. "Ye shud alwis be careful," said he, "not to be too greedy at the Well o' Youth."

"It's a fine tale," I replied; and maybe something in my voice made him think I was mocking him.

"It's no lie I'm tellin' ye," he said, "but the God's truth!"

"Och, away out of that with you!" said I, for I've lived in towns and the sap of life has gone out of me. "It would take more water than's in the well of St. Brigid to make me young enough to believe a tale like that!"

"Aw, God help ye," said Michael, "but ye're in the quare bad way! Sure, if ye don't want til belave a thing, it dussen matter whether it's true or not; and if ye do want til belave it, sure it dussen matter aythir."

AMBITION

I MET him in Kew Gardens, where the rhododendrons are thickest. He was standing gazing at a great clump of red blooms, and there was a curious little smile on his face, expressive of the pleasure a child or a savage must feel in contemplating a pleasing but uncomprehended thing. It would indeed have been a most insensible creature that could have passed between those bright bushes unmoved, and there was nothing singular in the fact that a man should be standing still in front of the rhododendrons with a glad look on his face. It was when I met him later on that I thought him an odd sort of being. We sat on the same seat, and we laughed at precisely the same moment when a child went by, making a curious sound by way of singing ; and that made us friends for the little while that we sat there, gazing idly about us. He was a little thin man, with delicate features and mild grey eyes. His hair was thin and wispy and discoloured, but neatly brushed. His clothes were old, but, save for their age, impeccable. There was about him

an air of dinginess that was difficult to describe. You could not say that he was dingy because his clothes were very worn or unsightly, or his trousers were baggy and frayed at the edges, or his boots were down-at-heel or thin-soled; for none of those things was true. He did not appear to you in parts; he appeared to you as a whole, and that whole amazingly dingy.

I discovered that he was a bookseller's assistant, and I was pleased to learn that this was his occupation; for I am a lover of books, and I thought to myself: "Now I shall be able to talk about books and bookmen for an hour or so with one who knows something of both. . . ."

"I don't do much reading myself," he said. "Don't 'ave the time." I was overwhelmed at the dropped aitch. Such mutilation of language was becoming, no doubt, in a grocer or an insurance agent, or some such clod, but utterly improper in one who handled books. "Reading isn't much in my line," he continued; "not what you would call reading. I mean to say, I read the paper now and again, when I have time, I mean, and I always get *Rule Britannia*"—that is not the name of the paper he mentioned—"but not what you would call reading, I don't. I 'aven't the time for it."

I inquired whether he never felt any desire to take down a book from its shelf in a quiet part of the day and read it.

"Not what you would call read it, I don't," he repeated. "I might 'ave a look at the pictures, if there were any, or blow the dust off the edges, or look at the price on the fly-leaf; but not what you would call read."

I shifted the conversation to other topics. It was disappointing to have drawn so hopeless a blank on the subject of books, and so I went to that ignoble thing, politics. I said what I thought of this party and that, one political policy and another, that politician and the other politician, and then inquired what his views were. He dared say I was right. He was not one of those who took much interest in politics. In his opinion they were all much alike, meaning thereby that they were all equally bad. He was inclined to think that there was a great deal in political life which could do with a little showing up—he quite agreed with *Rule Britannia* about that. Not that he thought that things were quite as bad as *Rule Britannia* sometimes tried to make out; he believed in moderation in all things, and particularly in expressions of opinion; but this he did think, and this he was prepared to assert emphatically: things were not as good as they might be, and could very well be improved. Of course, he added, he might be wrong. Who mightn't? The greatest in the world might sometimes be wrong. He well remembered how his father, now lamentably dead, had said that

the man who never made a mistake never made anything ; and he was inclined to think that that was true. But still, making all allowances for error, he thought that things were not so good as they might be.

" I don't really take much interest in politics, of course. I don't 'ave the time. You see, I 'ave to be at the shop so long. I 'ave to be there at nine, you know, and we don't close until eight. Charing Cross Road hours are very late, you see, and on Saturdays it's later still ; so, of course, I don't 'ave the time, do I ? "

I remarked that his life did not appear to be a very exhilarating one. " Oh, I don't know," he replied. " It's not so bad, you know. It could be worse, couldn't it ? I know some people much worse off than I am—I do, really. It's not what you would call an exciting life, not very, I mean, but it's regular, and you get used to it ; and, of course, excitement doesn't suit some men. It mightn't suit me. You never know, do you ? So perhaps it's as well things are like they are."

He never went to a theatre or a concert or to any sort of amusement. He hadn't the time. His chief, if not his sole recreation was a little stroll in the Gardens on a Sunday morning.

" It's just as well, perhaps," he said, " that I 'aven't much time for any of those things. You see, in our business the pay is very small—very small—not what you would call much ; and if I

'ad much time on my 'ands I might get discontented, and I shouldn't like that. Probably it's good for me. My father used to say 'ard work never killed no one, and I think that's true."

I looked at the little, mean-looking man with the mild grey eyes and the delicate features, sitting there surrounded by the splendidly coloured rhododendrons, shaming us humans with their magnificence, and of a sudden I became presumptuous.

" Don't you ever get tired of the monotony of it ? " I asked him.

" Oh, no," he replied. " What would be the good ? "

" But don't you feel you want to do something better than that with your life ? Ambition, I mean ? "

For the first time a look of yearning came into his eyes, and he stared steadily in front of him for a second or so.

" Yes," he said, after a little while, " sometimes I think it would be nice to have two pounds a week certain. . . ."

THE BLIND MAN

THERE was a man that was blind from his birth to whom sight was given suddenly. He saw before he knew that he could see, and since he did not know that his sight had been given to him he was afraid, for he thought that there was something the matter with his eyes.

Those who were passing stopped to listen to him. "Why, what ails you?" they demanded of the blind man.

"I am afraid," he replied. "There was nothing in my eyes a moment ago, and now there are great shadows! . . ."

"What do you see?" they said.

"See!" cried the blind man impatiently. "I cannot see. Have I not told you that I am blind?"

"But tell us what is in your eyes."

The blind man stood for a moment quietly, and his eyes looked fixedly towards the man who held his hand.

"There is a great shadow in my eyes," he said

at last, "and sound comes from it. It moves. Oh, I am afraid! . . . Is that a man?"

And the man who held his hand said, "I am a man, and these that are about me are men and women. Those are houses that you see reaching above you."

"I am afraid to move!"

"Come," they said, "take but one step. It will be easy when you have done that."

"I am afraid," he said, looking up at the great buildings on either side of the street. "I am afraid that they will fall on me."

The crowd laughed at him, saying, "We have walked between those houses since we were born, and they have done us no harm. We built them."

"But I have not seen them before."

"You knew that they were there. You have lived in some of them. You can see them now. Look how we push them, and they do not fall!"

"It is very strange," said the blind man.

"Now, you must walk," they urged again.

"I must walk!"

He put his foot out as he had done in the days when he could not see.

"No," they said, "you must lift your feet from the ground. You must not drag them so. It is only blind men who shuffle along. Men who can see lift their feet from the ground."

"I shall fall."

" We will save you if you fall."

He stood still, gazing queerly at the street.

" What is all that ? " he asked, pointing to the horses and carts that passed rapidly.

" That is the traffic," they said. " You must not step off the pavement until you are accustomed to the sight of it. Even men who see are sometimes afraid of it. It moves so quickly."

" I wish I had not lost my blindness ! "

" It is cowardly to say that ! "

" I was happy in my blindness ! "

" You will be happy with your sight."

" I do not want to see ! There is so much to learn."

" You cannot help yourself," they said. " You are blind no longer. You can see. You must go on seeing ! "

" I am afraid ! "

They brought him to a quiet place so that he might get accustomed to seeing.

" Look about you," they said. " Look at the green."

" Green ! " he said, puckering up the flesh between his eyes in the manner of one who is puzzled. " What is green ? "

" It is a colour," they replied.

" Oh, yes," he said, trying to associate the word with the idea that had been in his mind before he had received his sight. " I understand. It is a colour."

"This is grass," they said.

"Grass! It is green, is it not?"

"It is."

"That is what green is," he said, looking at the grass intently. "May I take some?"

They put grass into his hands, and he looked at it for a long time. "That is green!" he murmured; and as he spoke his eyes wandered to a pine-tree that stood near. "What is that?" he asked; and they told him.

"Has it got colour, too?" he said.

"It also is green," they replied.

"But it is not the same colour as the grass!" He turned to them reproachfully. "You said that this was green," he exclaimed, holding out the blades of grass to them, "and now you say that that is green!" He pointed to the pine-tree. "You are deceiving me," he said bitterly. "I am a blind man and have never seen before. You are mocking me!"

Said they: "The grass and the pine-tree are both green. There are varieties of green. There is light green and dark green, the green of grass and the green of the pine-tree; there is green that is almost yellow, and green like blue and green like black. There is the green of holly leaves and ivy, and the green of corn and wheat. There is the green of young leaves in spring and the green of old leaves in autumn. There is not one green, but many kinds of green."

" And are all things like that ? " he asked.

" All things are like that," they replied.

" Then, indeed, it were better for me that I had remained blind. How shall I find my way through the world, when I must stop to learn all these things about one thing ? When I have learned green I must learn blue, and when I have learned blue I must learn red. When I know the pine-tree I must learn to know the oak and the ash and the willow. I am too old to learn all these things. I do not want my sight. I wish to be blind again. I was happy when I was blind. I could move about without fear. My stick tapping on the ground enabled me to find my way. I am not happy without my stick."

* * * * *

They left the blind man, and told him he must learn to walk by himself. He besought them not to leave him, and moaned piteously when they said they must go. " We have much to do," they said. " You must learn to stand by yourself, so that you may come and help us."

" I shall never be able to help," he said. " I shall never cease to be afraid."

When they had gone he sat down on the ground, and was filled with despair. The clouds passing swiftly over his head caused him to tremble lest they should fall out of the sky and overwhelm him in disaster. He sat for a long time, looking about him, and then said to himself, " I will try

to walk." He raised himself slowly and fearfully from the ground and stood up. He became dizzy and swayed a little. "I shall fall down," he said to himself. But though he swayed a little and his legs rocked, he did not fall. He moved, and then, his voice being tremulous, said, "I can walk a step, I can walk!" He moved quickly, and fell. "I knew," he said ruefully, and he rubbed himself where he had been bruised. "I knew that I should fall!" And he declared that he would walk no more. But after a while he said he would try again, and he walked a long way until he came to the end of the field where a hedge was. "I can walk!" he said joyfully. "I can walk! I can walk!" He turned to walk back again, and when he had gone part of the way, he said, "I will run!" And he ran, but so quickly that he could not stop, and he collided with the hedge, and was torn by the thorns. "I will walk," he said, "but I will not run."

* * * * *

After he had walked and had run and had leaped, and could go about the earth like other men, he came to the town and walked through the street in which his sight had come to him. And he was not afraid. He walked easily. "It is almost," he said, "as if I were blind again!"

COLLEAGUES

MR. JUSTICE MCBURNIE stepped quickly into the shelter of the little passage, and collided with the man who had already taken refuge there.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured. "It's very dark. . . ."

"That's all right, sir," the stranger replied in a cheery voice. "Bit awkward comin' in 'ere out of the light, ain't it? Sudden, I mean."

"Yes," replied the judge, turning to look at the rain-drenched street. "A very heavy shower," he added.

"Yes, an' come on so sudden, too. Funny sort of weather we bin 'avin' lately, ain't we? One minute sun shinin', an' the next you get soaked through. No certainty about it. I suppose it's bein' so near the sea, an' the 'ills, an' one thing an' another."

"I suppose so," said Mr. Justice McBurnie in the tone of one who is indifferent to the conversation of his companion. He looked for a moment at him, and saw a small man, seemingly of mild manners, with an odd way of smiling when he

spoke, as though beneath his most commonplace phrase there lurked some inscrutably comic meaning known only to him.

"You're a native of this town?" asked the judge.

"Oh, yes. Born an' bred 'ere. I got a shop, you know."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I do a bit of travellin' now an' again. Nothink to speak of. . . . Gummy, ain't it comin' down, eh?"

The storm had grown in severity while they stood in the passage, and the rain came down in sheets.

"Most unfortunate," murmured Mr. Justice McBurnie. "I've come quite a long way from my hotel without an umbrella or a mackintosh, I hope it won't last much longer."

The little man smiled in his odd, superior, knowing way. "You never know," he said, "now the Assizes is on!"

"The Assizes!"

"Yes. Some people say there's bound to be bad weather when the Assizes is on. 'Specially when there's a murder case. Funny the things people do say about Assizes, ain't it?"

The judge did not reply.

"Now, there's my ole mother. She would 'ave it that it was against the law for a butcher to serve on a jury tryin' a man for 'is life. She

wouldn't believe it wasn't true. Of course, it ain't true. I ast a gentleman once—'e was a lawyer, you know—an' 'e said 'e'd never 'eard of such a thing."

"What a curious thing for your mother to believe!" said Mr. Justice McBurnie, turning to the garrulous little man.

"Yes it was, wasn't it? Of course she don't believe it now, sir. She's dead."

"Oh indeed!"

"Yes. She was a good ole soul. Seventy-two she was, an' 'ad 'er senses to the last. But she wouldn't believe it wasn't true about butchers, sir, not if the queen 'erself 'ad swore it on the Bible. She said it stood to reason butchers wouldn't be allowed to try a man for his life. 'Killin' animals all day,' she said, 'made 'em callous, an' they'd 'ang you as soon as look at you!'"

Mr. Justice McBurnie laughed. "Oh," he said, "was that why she objected to butchers on juries?"

"Yes, sir, an' you couldn't shake 'er out of it. Of course, butchers is a bit 'ard. No doubt about it. Stan's to reason, as she said. You can't go on takin' life like they do an' not get a bit 'ardened, can you? On'y wot I used to say to 'er was, it ain't the law. It may be common sense, ses I, but it ain't the law. But she would 'ave it that it was. Stubborn, sir! Seventy-two, she was, but *that* stubborn!"

The judge advanced towards the edge of the passage and gazed up at the dark sky, and then up and down the street.

"It doesn't seem to get any better," he said.

"No," said the stranger, "it won't now, I shouldn't think."

"I wonder if I could get a cab or some sort of vehicle?"

The little man thought it was probable that he might. "I'll go up to the 'ead of the street," he said, "when the rain's over a bit, an' see if I can get one for you."

"You're very kind . . ."

"Oh no, sir, not at all! You're a stranger 'ere, an' if we can't do a thing like that for a stranger, wot's the good of us?"

They stood in silence for a few moments, and then the little man began to speak again.

"You know, 'e must feel a bit queer to-night, I should think."

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Mr. Justice McBurnie.

"The chap wot's goin' to be tried to-morrow. Young fella, 'e is. Killed a girl 'e was walkin' out with."

"Oh, yes! Yes, yes!"

"I suppose you 'eard about it. Jealousy!"

The judge nodded his head.

"Now, there's a thing I can't understand, you know. If I was walkin' out with a girl, an' she

got up to any tricks, runnin' after other fellas, I wouldn't go an' kill 'er or nothink. I'd simply tell 'er to go to 'ell, or somethink of that sort. Silly to go an' get 'ung for her! Some people's funny-natured, ain't they?"

"That's true."

"We ain't all alike, of course. Wouldn't do if we was. But I mean to say I can't understand a chap goin' an' killin' a girl for a thing like that. I mean to say, there don't seem no sense in it, some'ow."

"There isn't."

"No. An' yet they go an' do it. I've knowed case after case like that. Decent enough young fellas, you know, on'y they go an' do a thing like that. It seems a pity, some'ow."

"Yes . . ."

"Of course, you 'ave to be firm about it. It wouldn't do to go lettin' 'em off or anythink, on'y some'ow. . . . Well, there was that young chap Smith—now, 'e wasn't a bad chap, 'e wasn't. A bit 'ot-'eaded. 'E done the same's this chap, an' 'e got 'ung same's this one will . . ."

"How do you know this one will be hanged?"

"Oh, 'e'll be 'ung all right! The judge can't 'elp 'isself. Clear case. Clear as anythink. I dessay the judge won't like doin' it. No one would. On'y it's got to be done. You've got to 'ave judges, an' if people goes about killin'

other people, the judges 'ave got to sentence them to death. Can't 'elp theirselves. That's 'ow I look at it."

"I daresay you are right. I think the rain is going off. I believe it'll stop soon."

"Can't help theirselves. It's got to be done, an' if it's got to be done, some one's got to do it. That's wot I told my ole mother about butchers. No good cursin' 'em, an' callin' 'em 'ard-'earted an' all that, if you eat meat. You can't 'ave meat unless there's butchers. I don't s'pose they do it for the fun of the thing!"

"No, I daresay not," said Mr. Justice McBurnie. "Do you think you could do what you so kindly suggested a few moments ago: get a cab for me? I'm sorry to trouble you. . . ."

"No trouble at all, sir." The little man walked to the entrance to the passage and stood there for a moment or two while he turned up the collar of his coat. "You know," he said, turning to the judge, "they'll 'ang 'im all right. Can't help theirselves!"

"Well, well," said the judge impatiently.

"You know," continued the little man, "it's the first case in this town. We got a new gaol 'ere. I'm a bit interested in the case."

"Naturally."

"I knoo 'im well, sir. Often an' often 'e'd come into my shop to 'ave a shave. Very

partickler 'e was about bein' shaved. Very partickler. Couldn't bear to 'ave it done *up*. Very tender skin 'e 'ad."

"If you wouldn't mind . . ."

"Don't mind a bit, sir. Not a bit. I never thought 'e would come to this. Come into my shop reg'lar 'e would. I never felt about any one the way I do about 'im. . . ."

Mr. Justice McBurnie came to the little man's side and peered up the street. "I believe I can hear wheels," he said.

"So you can sir. I'll just run up and fetch the cab sir. Shan't be 'alf a sec!"

In a little while the cab came down the street and the judge stepped out of the passage.

"Won't you let me drive you home?" he said to the stranger.

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure, sir. I ain't got far to go . . ."

"You've been so very obliging," continued the judge, "I should like to . . ."

"Well, thank you, sir."

They stepped into the cab and the judge told the stranger the name of the hotel at which he was stopping.

"You'd better tell him to drive to your home first, and then he can take me to the hotel."

"Yes, sir." He called the name of his street to the cabman. "That's the name of the 'otel

where the judge is stoppin'," he said, as they drove off.

Mr. Justice McBurnie leant back in his seat and smiled. "Yes," he said, "I am the judge."

The stranger sat up and regarded him with curiosity. "Are you, now!" he said. "You know, that's strange, that is! You an' me's in the same line of business, so to speak."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Funny coincidence, I call it, you an' me talkin' the way we was about *'im*."

"About whom?"

"'Im as killed the girl. 'E'd be surprised to 'ear about this, 'e would."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said Mr. Justice McBurnie.

"Well, it's simple enough, sir. You're the judge an' I'm the 'angman."

Mr. Justice McBurnie sat up in his seat, and the smile disappeared from his lips. He tried to speak, but the words clung to his teeth and would not be uttered.

"Sort of in the same business, you an' me," said the little man. "You begin it, and I end it. Funny coincidence, I call it. Fancy me tellin' you about 'im, an' you the judge and me the 'angman! Used to come into my shop reg'lar 'e did, an' 'ave a shave. Very partickler, 'e was. . . . Wot did you say, sir?"

Mr. Justice McBurnie did not speak.

"I expec' you're tired, sir. Up too late. I get out 'ere. You know, when you come to think of it, it's a funny coincidence. . . . Goo'-night, sir! Goo'-night!"

RETIREMENT

MR. MARTIN awoke at five o'clock and stretched himself in bed. "Funny," he said, "'ow I keep on wakin' up same's if I was goin' to work!" He lay still for a few moments, blinking at the ceiling, and then, in the manner of one who has attacked a problem and found it insoluble, murmured, "I dunno! 'Abit, I suppose!"

He turned over on his side, pulled the bedclothes tightly about him, and resolutely shut his eyes. He lay so for five minutes, and then, kicking the clothes away, got out of bed. "No good," he said; "only makin' meself silly tryin' to sleep on!"

He dressed himself and descending to the kitchen, busied himself lighting the fire and putting his house in order. He lived alone. His wife had been dead for so long a time that it seemed to him almost as if he had never been married, and after her death, being childless, he had continued to live on in the house, doing such work as was necessary himself. He was a victim of the work habit. He could not sit down and

be decently idle. He planned out schemes for filling all the moments of his life when he was not asleep. He got his wife to teach knitting to him so that he might be employed at those times when he had to sit still, a thing that he loathed doing.

Oddly enough, he disliked work. His supreme desire was for a life of slow effort and leisure ; a time when he could take things easy. His apparently consuming craving for work was not due to his love of work, but to a desire to get enough money saved to be able to retire from work altogether. And so he had devoted his youth to joyless, restless days and nights, abstaining from all recreation and pleasure because, so far from bringing money to him, it took money from him. He had turned his wife, a quiet, subdued woman, into a machine for saving money.

And here was the result. He was now a man of means, living in retirement. He was positively a man of independent income. He could get up when he liked, dally over his food as long as he liked, go out or stay in, make holiday or work, just as he pleased. For six months before the actual date of his retirement his spirits had been so buoyant that his familiars imagined he had gone out of his wits. He would now and then cease from working to chuckle aloud !

When he had resigned his post his employers

held a meeting of their workmen, and before them all called him "a faithful servant." They presented him with a letter of thanks, signed by each member of the firm, and awarded a pension to him. An account of the proceedings appeared in the local paper, together with his photograph. . . . Reward, indeed, for all that he had done!

Every morning since then (and that was a fortnight ago) he had enjoyed the bliss of lying in bed and stretching his legs, knowing that he need not get up, though all his friends were hurrying sleepily towards their jobs. It astonished him to find that he could not lie on until eight o'clock, as he had always vowed he would. Each night, on retiring, he solemnly pledged himself not to get up at five, and each morning he broke his pledge.

"Can't 'elp it," he said to himself, by way of excuse. "Of course," he went on, "it'll take me some time to get used to it. Only natural that, any'ow!"

* * * * *

Whilst he was preparing his breakfast and telling himself that it was silly for him to do this menial work—"Only fit for women!"—and that he must really engage a good servant, the newspaper boy threw the morning journal through the open door. Mr. Martin went and picked it up. "Don't 'ave to wait now to read the paper," he

said. "It's all right bein' able to sit down to your breakfis with the paper an' take as long as you like."

It was the one solid pleasure he had as yet derived from his retirement, the privilege of reading the day's news at leisure. He read the paper, while he ate his meal, from the title on the front page almost to the name of the printer at the foot of the last column on the last page. It was his way of asserting the fact that he could do what he liked with his time. But even newspapers come to an end, and when he had reluctantly discarded the journal, he busied himself clearing away the remnants of his meal and restoring the room to order.

"Wonder what I shall do now," he said to himself, when he had done this. "Lemme see! Yesterday I went for a walk to the Square, an' looked at all the shops, an' then I come 'ome again! An' the day before yesterday I walked to the Square. . . . Lord bless me, I done the same that day as I done yesterday! No good doin' that every day. Lemme see, now, wot'll I do to-day?"

He sat still for a few moments—it was really a few moments, but it seemed to him, so unused was he to sitting still, to be an interminably long time—and then got up and put on his coat and hat. "I dunno," he said. "Don't seem to be nowhere to go excep' the Square!"

He went out into the street, and walked slowly towards the centre of the town. Every now and then he caught himself walking quickly, and stopped short. "No need to 'urry now!" he said. "Got all day to get there!" He arrived at the Square, and walked past all the shops without looking into any of them. "I seen them all now," he said to himself, and then added a little querulously, "Tired of seein' 'em!" He came to the Free Library, and decided to go in. "'Taint no good, though," he murmured. "I'm no 'and at readin'!"

It was a slack time of the year, and many unemployed men were in the Reading Room. The newspapers were all monopolised, and so were all the illustrated papers. There was nothing left for Mr. Martin but the heavy quarterly reviews and trade journals and things like the *Vegetarians' Gazette* and the *Theosophists' Review*, none of which made any appeal to him. He waited patiently while a lady solidly read through the *Illustrated London News*, and then found it was a copy he had already seen. He got up in disgust and went out into the Square again.

"Wot a nole this place is," he said. "Ain't nothink to do!"

He hesitated for a while outside a picture palace, but did not enter. "Only fit for kids an' women," he said, and turned away. He walked

on all sides of the Square again, looking into the window of each shop that he passed, hoping to see something of interest. At the last shop but one he was rewarded: an assistant was redressing the window, and the old man spent an exhilarating half-hour watching him do it. But he got tired of standing still, and so he drifted out of the Square into some of the neighbouring streets. In High Street he met his former manager.

"Hilloa!" exclaimed the manager, "enjoying yourself, eh?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Martin. "I'm 'avin' a great time, walkin' about doin' nothink!"

"Well," the manager rejoined, "you've worked hard enough for it, and you deserve a rest!"

"That's true enough," said Mr. Martin, as they separated. "I'm not sure I ain't worked too 'ard!"

He got tired of walking about aimlessly. It was too soon to return home for his midday meal. He had an hour or two to get through before he need do that, and it came to him forcibly that he had done all the things he usually did. He became a little angry about it, and blamed his town for its lack of interesting things. He had few friends; he had been too busy working to make friends; he took no interest in politics, because, so far as he could see, they were unprofitable; and the newspapers and magazines

confused him. He could not sit still, and he could not think. He had allowed his mind to go out of training for years, and at his age it was impossible to get it to run smoothly again. He had spent his life in continual labour in order that this time when he could dispense with labour might come, and had neglected the things that would make leisure worth while ; and now that he had leisure, leisure was irksome to him, for he did not know what to do with it.

"I'm getting sick of this 'ere," he said, stumping round angrily. "Gives a chap the 'ump this sort of thing does ! I've a good mind to go an' get a job."

The manager of his old firm came round the corner as he thought this, and the old man impulsively went up to him.

"Look 'ere, Mr. 'Arper," he said, "can I come back to the shop to-morrow mornin' ? "

The manager looked at him in amazement.

"Come back to the shop ! " he exclaimed. "Good Heavens, what do you want to do that for ? "

"Well, you see, it's like this ! I dunno wot the 'ell to do with myself ! I ain't used to this sort of life. I 'ave a feelin' I'll go silly if I don't get somethink to do ! "

"Well, why don't you enjoy yourself ? "

"I can't. I don't know 'ow to. You see, I always bin a nard worker ! "

" Yes, yes, that's true ! "

" An' if you could see your way ! . . . "

The manager, looking uncomfortable, cleared his throat a little, and said, " You see it's difficult. We've given your job to another man, and of course you're not so young as you used to be, are you ? "

" No, that's true enough. I'm sixty-six ! "

" We really need a young man for your work. We felt that several years ago, but you were such a faithful servant, we didn't like to . . . You understand ! "

The old man looked at his manager in a puzzled way for a few moments, and then began to understand.

" You mean you was glad to get rid of me? " he began.

" Not quite that, but . . . "

Mr. Martin turned away, for Mr. Martin felt himself doing something he had never done before, not even when his wife died : *he was crying.*

" It's all right, sir," he said. " P'raps you're right."

The manager, affecting jocularity, bade him pull himself together, and wished him good-morning.

" You just knock about and enjoy yourself," he said.

" Yes, sir," said Mr. Martin, " I'll 'ave a try ! "

He stood still for a moment, after the manager had gone, wondering what he should do next.

"I think," he said, "I'll go for a walk in the Square, and look at the shops!"

THE REVELATION

I FOUND him sitting on the edge of Romney Marsh, on the side of the road from Hythe to Dymchurch, where the shooting ranges are. He was repairing one of his boots in an extraordinarily complex manner : pieces of string seemed to be the chief element in the process. It was a very hot day ; the sky was unclouded ; and the road from Hythe to Dymchurch is shelterless. I was tired and overheated, so I sat down in the shadow of the bracken beside him. He agreed that the weather was hot, and that it was a long time since we had had weather so hot. He agreed also that the farmers would be in a difficult position if the drought continued ; the burnt-up state of the fields did not indicate great stores of fodder. Still, it couldn't be helped, and if it were hard on farmers, it was good for other people. Not much good to him, though ; tramping was *not* a joy on a scorching, dusty day, particularly when your boots weren't of the best.

" Not much of a game, at any time, is it ? " I asked, passing the cigarettes.

"Like everything else," he said, lighting up; "has its bad points as well as its good!"

"Aimless sort of life," I suggested.

"Oh, I dunno! Not any worse than anything else!"

"Surely!" I exclaimed, in the Smilesian manner, "a man gets some satisfaction out of life when he feels he has done his share of the world's work!"

"P'raps," he said, non-committally, and then lapsed into silence.

A small squad of soldiers, returning to barracks from shooting at the targets, went by, red and weary; their tunics were open at the throat, and some of them had pushed their caps back on their heads so that what breeze there was might cool their brows. A motor-car came speedily from Hythe, throwing up clouds of dust as it went by, and in its train came a light cart, laden with trunks and children and a tired-looking woman.

"You know," said the tramp, suddenly, "I used to be respectable, and earn my living!"

I murmured vaguely, and he proceeded.

"Twenty years I was with one firm!" he said.

"Twenty years!"

"Yes, ever since I left school till I gave it up!"

"Twenty years is a long time! It seems odd you should go on the tramp after service like that!"

"It does seem funny, doesn't it! I often wonder at myself when I think of it!" He looked quizzically at me for a moment, and then said, "You know, you *do* do funny things now and then, don't you?"

I nodded.

"You don't know why you do it! Can't account for it, nohow. You just do it!"

I said that I should have thought that a steady man, with a record of twenty years' good service in one firm, would have little difficulty in getting fresh employment.

"Yes," he said, "p'raps you're right; only somehow I don't want a job!" I shrugged my shoulders. "No," he continued, quite without asperity in his voice. "No, I'm not a lazy chap. I was up at four this morning, and I've walked from Rye! . . . That's a good step on a day like this! No, it isn't that! I don't think a job's good enough!"

I asked him to explain, adding some foolishness about the dignity of labour, which I am afraid amused rather than inspired him. I detected that from the expression in his eyes. He did not say anything to indicate that he thought I was babbling nonsense. His manner was quiet and gentle and courteous, as though he found life so odd that he could not lose his temper about it, or be boorish even to those who were boorish to him.

"I used to think that," he said, simply, "and p'raps it's true. Only I didn't think so the day I gave it up, and I don't think so now. I don't suppose I ever shall!"

"Why did you give it up?" I asked.

"I often wonder about that myself! You see, it was like this! I was employed in a warehouse. Went there as a lad to run errands, and worked my way up to porter. I was getting twenty-three bob a week, and I worked from six in the morning till six at night!"

"Pretty long hours," I admitted.

"Oh, I dunno. There's lots worse than that."

"Of course," I said, "it was a regular job, and you were pretty safe, I suppose. Not like those poor devils of casual labourers!"

"That's true enough! I often thought that myself. My wife thought I was one of the lucky ones!"

"Dead, I suppose?"

"No, not that I know of!"

"You mean! . . . "

"Deserted her, yes!"

"You don't expect me to admire you, do you?"

"No. We had four youngsters, but two of them died. Consumption!"

"And what happened to the other two?"

"I don't know. She looked after them, I s'pose. She was a good sort of woman, you

know. I often think that. I s'pose I did wrong by her ! "

" You're a pretty bad lot," I said, with some disgust.

" Yes, I s'pose some people would think that. P'raps I am, only somehow—well, it's hard to tell, isn't it ? "

I said that the matter was clear enough to me.

" Yes, I know," he said, " but you have to be a thing before you can understand it properly. That's what I think ! "

" But why," I said, urgently, " did you throw up everything and take to this sort of life ? "

" Well, that's just what's so hard to explain. You see, I'm a steady sort of chap as a rule. I don't drink, or anything of that sort ! . . . I can't help wondering why I did it, and I can't make out why I don't go back again. That's what beats me. I often think of my wife, only somehow she don't seem to belong to me ! You know ! It's like as if I was looking in somewhere, and she was inside and I was out, and . . . Well, I suppose, it's how the dead thinks of the living. Can't feel the same about 'em somehow, as they did when they was alive. It's odd, you know ! "

I saw that he was in the mood for speculation, and I allowed him to ramble on without interruption.

" I went down to the warehouse one day just

the same as I always did. Caught a workman's tram and got there as usual. There wasn't anything special about the day. Just an ordinary day. I had my dinner in my pocket, wrapped up in a bit of newspaper. I remember it just the same's it was yesterday. Some bread and a cold sausage, and I meant to buy a cup of cocoa at a shop near the warehouse. There was a chap sitting beside me in the tram, reading a paper, and he said to me, 'This Smelton case is a bit 'ot, isn't it?' and I nodded my head, and said, 'Yes, it is,' and he said something else which I forget, and then he got off the tram, and I followed him. I don't remember rightly what happened after that, but I can recollect having my dinner, and saying to myself, 'Not much of a meal this for a man!' And it wasn't, you know! Bread and cold sausage! Of course, she couldn't help it! Probably didn't have anything at all herself! . . . And then I suddenly felt what a silly game it all was. 'Fancy,' says I to myself, 'slogging at it like this twelve hours every day for twenty-three bob a week!' Bread and cold sausage! Twenty years I'd been at it, mind you, and that was all I was getting. And no chance of getting any more. That was what knocked me over! I might go on working another twenty years and be no better off at the end of them than I was then. No prospects! Every day the same! Six to six! Twenty-

three bob a week. Bread and cold sausage. 'God,' said I, 'what a life! . . . ' And then I just gave up! I went and drew my money—it was pay-day—and I cleared off. I sent half of it to her, and said I wasn't coming back again. *I was fed up!*"

He got up from the grass and collected his goods.

"And that's how it was," he said, standing in front of me, and looking like one who seeks for explanations of things which cannot be explained. "It just came over me like that, and I can't make it out, and I don't suppose I ever shall. It's funny, you know, that's what it is; but funny things do happen sometimes."

THE FOOL

THE Englishman came up the old, ascending road that leads from Ballyshannon to the townlands of Rossnowlagh and Belalt, and where it reaches its height and begins to dip again, he paused for a while before a gap in the hedge to look down on the sea that lay before him like a great shining thing. To his right was Donegal Bay, and in the heart of it was the bright splash of white light that sailors call " the silver streak " ; to his left was the salmon leap fronting Ballyshannon, and beyond that, distant and misty, the black hills of Sligo pierced the clouds and were lost. Below him, sitting on the earth, was John O'Moyle.

" Good morning, Pat ! " exclaimed the Englishman.

" Me name's not Pat," replied O'Moyle ; " it's John O'Moyle, o' the town o' Ballyshannon since ivir A wus born ! "

The Englishman smiled. " I thought all you fellows were called Pat ! " he said.

" Aw, indade, there's manny in the wurl' like

you, God help ye!" It was plain that the man was out of his wits, so the English tourist forbore to be angry. "It's a brave sort o' a day!" continued O'Moyle.

"Very fine, indeed—very fine!"

"It's like the shinin' hosts o' heaven, the day! Wi' the sun shinin' on the watter, an' all!"

"Yes, yes! . . ."

"D'ye see thon white light on the sea?" said the witless man, pointing to the silver streak on Donegal Bay. The Englishman nodded. "It's the ladder that the angels come down thrum Heaven on t' Jacob that wus slapin' at the fut o' it wondherin' how much he'd be gettin' at the market fur Laban's sheep!"

"That's a quaint fancy! . . ."

"Eh! It's no fancy, but the God's truth! Are ye goin' far?"

The Englishman explained that he was walking over to Rossnowlagh, that he proposed to lunch there, and then walk on to the town of Donegal. Nine Irish miles it was, he understood, from Rossnowlagh to Donegal.

"It is that, iv'ry inch o' it! Sure, it's the long walk, but the railway runs there, an' if ye've anny money ye can travel be train. Mebbe ye're a traveller?"

"I prefer to walk," said the Englishman, ignoring the inquiry concerning his occupation.

" It's a quare thing t' want t' be walkin' whin ye have the money t' ride ! Ye're not doin' it fur fun, are ye ? "

" That's just what I am doing it for ! " and the Englishman laughed.

" Well, A declare ! Ye're an Englishman, aren't ye ? "

" I am," said the traveller, with quiet pride.

" Ay, A thought as much ! "

The Englishman looked about him, observing the ill-condition of the fields. " It's a poor sort of a country this, isn't it ? " he said.

" Aw, it cud be worse, an' it cud be better. God made it, an' ye can't grum'le ! There's better lan' on the road t' Donegal, but sure the Prodesans has it all. The like o' lan' like that is all that Cathliks can git ! "

" Well, now," said the Englishman, " don't you think that that's a strange thing ? The Protestants are prosperous and the Catholics aren't ! "

" It's not strange at all. If ye wur a Cathlik an' yer great-gran'father wus hanged fur a rebel, an' his brother that wus a holy priest wus shot dead be sodgers in a glen fur sayin' a mass, an' ye wur driven thrum wan place till another an' the lan' that wus in yer fam'ly thrum the time o' Red Hugh O'Neill wus tuk thrum ye by a damned oul' scoundrel called Crumwill an' give till strangers thrum over the sea, wud ye be

much better aff nor us, Prodesan or no Prodesan ? "

" Oh, of course ! " exclaimed the Englishman. " Historical reasons, and so forth, no doubt ! But —of course, I don't want to hurt your feelings—you quite understand !—but really you know, the Catholics in Ireland are a shiftless lot. I've been here a week now ! . . . "

" It's a long time whin ye come t' think o' it ! "

" I don't pretend to have formed an expert opinion on the subject, but so many men in Ireland seem to lounge through life. They've no energy, no go, no hustle in them ! You, for instance, what is a fine, healthy-looking fellow like you doing lounging about in a field like this ? Isn't there any work you can do ? "

John O'Moyle, being a half-wit, stood up in the field and gazed at the Englishman standing above him in the break in the hedge. " What would I be workin' fur ? " he demanded.

" Every man ought to work ! It's—it's only decent. Besides, people are happier that work ! "

O'Moyle climbed up the earth bank, and stood beside the Englishman. " Do you see thon wee man wi' the black hair in the fiel' ayont ? " he said, pointing to where a peasant was spraying potatoes—a frail, hairy man, with a tank containing disinfectant strapped to his back. The Englishman nodded.

" Thon's Jimmy M'Givern ! " continued John

O'Moyle. "Thon's his fiel'. He got it in the Lan' Purchase! He has a bit more, too. He's a man o' propirty, is Jimmy M'Givern! He works hard, very hard! He's up at five an' sometimes earlier iv'ry day, an' he works thrum the dawn o' day t' the dark o' night, an' hardly ivir staps. Ay, he's a hard worker is Jimmy M'Givern! Workin', workin' all the time, bendin' over purties, an' mebbe whin he's not lukkin' the blight comes in aff the sea wan night an' destroys the crap entirely!"

"Ah, but there's the thrill of working his own land! It's his own, you say—he got it from the Land Purchase Commissioners!"

"Ay, it'll be his if he lives long enough. At the end of seventy-two years, when he's paid aff the instalments, it'll be his!" John was silent for a moment. He stood watching the bent figure as it went up and down the rows of potatoes, spraying them lest the blight should get at them and turn them black while he slept. Then he laughed. "Mebbe ye're right, sir!" he added. "But A'm thinking A'd rather be a fool nor be Jimmy M'Givern! A git up whin A like, an' A beg a crust o' bread fur the love o' God, an' a sup o' drink! An' A come out an' luk at the sea, wi' the sun in me face an' the win' blowin' in me hair! . . ."

The Englishman moved on. He began to fear that he would be late for luncheon. He nodded

to John and passed on. Where the road bends slightly there is a cottage, and he stopped to ask for a drink of water. An old woman gave him to drink. Looking up the road he saw John O'Moyle standing regarding the figure of Jimmy M'Givern. He thanked the old woman, and pointing to John, said, "He's a queer sort of chap, isn't he?"

"Is it John O'Moyle ye mane?" she replied. "Aw, sure, ye needen bother yer head about him! He's astray in his mind, God help him!"

CRISIS

Mr. 'Enry Martin walked smartly up the Walworth Road in the manner befitting a man who has not long been married and who is eager to get home to his wife on a fine Saturday afternoon. He imagined to himself a meal with Aggie, a little smoke, and then a stroll up the Camberwell Road to Ruskin Park, and a lazy lounge during the afternoon, watching the boys at cricket or the stupid old gentlemen playing bowls, a game which seemed to Mr. 'Enry Martin to be profoundly silly. He was prepared to admit, if pressed on the point, that no doubt it suited some people, and that, as likely as not, they enjoyed it ; but he thought it was a poor game, fit only for females and fat old men. Nevertheless, he liked to sit and look at the players as they rolled the bowls over the well-cut grass. Aggie liked the tennis-players best of all, her affection for them being derived from the novelettes ; it appeared that all the Really Nice People played tennis with great grace. Such was the afternoon that Mr. 'Enry Martin

anticipated for himself and his wife. Such had been the Saturday afternoons, on the whole, that they had spent together since their marriage. . . .

If it was an eager, pleased 'Enry Martin that went into No. 5 Jordan Grove on that warm day, it was a puzzled, vaguely angry 'Enry Martin that came out again later on; not only was it a puzzled 'Enry Martin that came out of the house, but it was a lonely 'Enry Martin, for Aggie, for the first time for six months, remained behind. He walked slowly up the Grove towards the main road, looking very much like a man who has been violently punched on the head, but is unable to say why he has been punched, or by whom. Where the Grove joins the Walworth Road he met George Halliday, whom every one calls Ole George, for no particular reason.

"'Illoa, 'Enry!" exclaimed Ole George, as he came up to 'Enry, and 'Enry moodily replied, "'loa!"

"Nah, nah!" said Ole George, "down't look so bloomin' merry, ole chap! I can't stand it, reely, I can't! It 'urts me to laugh! . . ."

"Ow, chuck it, for 'eaven's sike!" was all that 'Enry replied to Ole George's flow of sarcasm.

"Bit upset, ain't you?" inquired Ole George.

"So'd you be if you was me!"

"Ow! 'Ow's that?"

"Down't knaow wot's the matter with Aggie!

Fair snapped the 'ead off me, she did. Never seen her like it before. 'Ope she ain't goin' to be like it alwis ! "

" W'y, wot's the matter ? "

" I down't knaow ! As soon as I got in, I could see somethink was wrong. Cryin' she was, an' didden knaow wot she was cryin' for. ' Wot's up, ole girl ! ' ses I. ' Nothink,' ses she. ' Ow,' ses I, like that, ' well, I shouldn't mike so much fuss abaht it if I was you ! ' ' Wouldn't you ? ' ses she. ' Naow,' ses I, ' I wouldn't ! ' An' then I ses, ' Wot's for dinner ? ' ' 'Ash ! ' ses she. ' 'Ash ! ' ses I, ' I 'ate 'ash !' ' It's all you'll git,' ses she, 'an' chance it ! ' The place didden look the same, some'ow. Clean enough, you knaow, on'y it didden look as if 'er 'eart was in it. You knaow ! "

Ole George nodded sagely, and 'Enry continued his tale of woe.

" Never said a word, she didden, w'ile we was 'avin it, neither, but kept on lookin' misable ! You knaow ! 'Umpified ! ' Comin' out,' ses I, w'en we'd cleared awy the dishes. ' Naow,' she ses, short-like. ' Ow, awright,' ses I, ' be nasty abaht it, on'y don't sy I didden ast ye ! ' ' Down't wanna gow aht,' ses she. An' then I fair lost me temper, an' talked strite til her. ' Look 'ere,' I ses, ' wot's the little gime, eih ? Wod you gettin' at, eih ? ' An' so 'elp me, she started cryin' as 'ard as she could, an' that fair

unnerved me, an' I put me arms roun' 'er, an' I ses, 'Look 'ere, ole girl, wot's up any'ow? Anyone bin annoyin' of you?' She started to blubber worse'n ever, an' 'ung on til me, an' kep' on sayin' she didden mean no 'arm, an' she'd be awright bymeby, an' she didden knaow wot was up with 'er. 'Tired-like,' she ses. 'I'll lie down for 'alf-a-nour, an' then I be awright! You go on aht an' let me be quiet,' she ses. An' 'ere I am. Rummy go, I call it!"

Ole George took him by the arm and led him into the "Sir William Walworth." He demanded that the young person behind the bar should supply him and his friend with two glasses of beer, and quick abaht it, see!

"You knaow," he said, when they had taken their first drink of the beer, and had solemnly said, "'Ere's lookin' *to*-wards you!"; "you knaow, you oughta be in a Nome, you ought!"

"'Ow du mean?" exclaimed 'Enry.

"'Ow do I mean! Ain't you got no bloomin' gumption?" He leant over and tapped 'Enry on the shoulder. "Cheps like you," he continued, "oughtn't t' be allowed t' git married! Down't knaow nothink!"

'Enry gazed at Ole George indignantly. "Strikes me," he said, "as 'ow you got somethink wrong with you, too. Talkin' like that ter a chap! Wod you mean by it, eih?"

" Ain't you got no understandin' ? Ain't you never 'eard of nothink ? "

" 'Eard of wot ? "

Ole George became so sarcastic that he could scarcely contain imself. " 'Eard of wot ! " he mimicked 'Enry. " W'y wot the 'ole bloomin' world 'as 'eard of, exceptin' you ! "

'Enry still looked blankly in front of him. " I dunno wot you're drivin' at," he said. " Off your 'ead wot I can see of it ! "

Ole George implored him to say where he had been born and brought up, and ended by assuring him that the 'eathen in 'is blindness knew more about things than 'Enry apparently did.

" Well, wot's it all abaht, then ! " said 'Enry impatiently. " It ain't my fault I down't knaow nothink. W'y down't you tell me wot it is, 'stead o' callin' me aht me nime ! "

Ole George called for two more beers, and quick about it too, miss, or you'll 'ear more'n you'll like, see ! And, when he was served, he leant over and said, in a very solemn whisper, " 'Enry, my boy, it's my belief as 'ow you're goin' ter do your dooty by the Stite ! "

" 'Ow du mean ? "

" Nah, look 'ere, 'Enry, wot does doin' your dooty be the Stite mean ? Wot's eddication for if you down't knaow thet, yet ? You're going ter be a nappy fawther, my boy, thet's wot you're goin' to be. Absolute ! "

" Wot ! "

" A nappy fawther, my boy ! "

'Enry stood up straight, and caught hold of Ole George by the coat. " Wod you sy ? " he repeated vacantly.

" Wot I 'ave said, I 'ave said," replied Ole George. " You didden ought t' be allowed t' be one be rights, not a chep thet down't knaow nothink didden ! "

" So 'elp me ! " exclaimed 'Enry.

" Bit of a oner, ain't it, eih ? "

" Fency me ! . . . Look 'ere, George, it's all right, ain't it ? No 'ank, I mean ! "

" 'Ank ! " said Ole George. Of course it ain't 'ank. W'en you're my age, my boy, you'll knaow it ain't a subject you can 'ank abaht ! "

" I can't 'ardly realise it ! . . . Of course, I knoo somethink 'ud 'appen somedy, but I never thought abaht it rightly. You knaow ! " Ole George nodded sympathetically. " Absolute knock-aht, it is," continued 'Enry. " Mikes you think, it do. Fair pulls you up. So 'elp me ! " He gazed at the beer in an abstracted fashion, and then raised the glass to his lips, but set it down again without drinking. " I better be gettin' 'ome," he said, " an' see after 'er ! "

" She be awright," replied Ole George. " Much better leave 'er alone. They likes t' be quiet at first. Funny things, women ! "

" Wot I can't git owver is me bein' a fawther,

y' knaow ! Mikes ye feel funny, down't it ? Of course, you're used to it, nah ! . . . "

" Never git used t' it," declared Ole George. " We've 'ad six, an' the last knocked me all of a neap jus' as much as the first. Never git used ter thet, you down't ! "

They finished the beer in silence, and then rose and went out of the public-house, and walked in the direction of home. There was a great noisy crowd in the street, and the harsh voices of the costermongers, crying their wares, came floating through the air. A blind man monotonously cried for pity on his condition, and an old woman turned the handle of a dismal barrel-organ. The street was hot, and reeking with the smell of overcrowded humans. All the noise of the world seemed concentrated in that one street. " Goo' God ! " 'Enry murmured to himself, his temples throbbing. " W'y cahn't they shut their silly rah ! "

" You be awright ! " said Ole George.

" Didden ought to 'ave said wot I did to 'er ! "

" She'll forget abaht it awright ! . . . "

They went through the crowd as though it were not there.

" Goo-night, ole man ! " said Ole George, as they separated.

" Goo'-night, George ! " was 'Enry's reply.

" She be awright presently," Ole George assured him, and left him.

He walked down the street like a man dazed. "Absolute knock-aht," he said, and then added, "So 'elp me!" He stood about the door of the house for a few minutes as if he were afraid to enter. "Upsets a chep, this sort o' thing!" he muttered as he entered the house. "You awright Aggie?" he said, softly, and she said that she was a little better.

"Like a cup o' tea?" he asked, preparing to lay the table.

"Thenk you, 'Enery."

He bustled about the room, preparing for the meal. "I tell you wot," he said. "You better stop in bed ter-morrer, an' I'll mike the breakfast! You see if I don't! I'm sorry I was nasty t' you t'-dy!"

She smiled at him, and assured him that it was all right. "You weren't reely nasty," she said, "it was me! . . ."

"Ow, naow, it weren't! . . . See 'ere, Aggie, I tell you wot. We'll 'ave 'ash ter-morrer for dinner if you like, eih? Or anythink you like, on'y down't you put yourself aht, see! I do thet awright. You lie still an' have a rest." He came close to her, and put his arms about her, and pressed her closely to him. "So 'elp me, Aggie," he said, "I'm sorry I jawred you, I am, strite!"

"It's awright, 'Enry," she replied. "You didden mean no 'arm!"

THE MATCH

MICHAEL HALLORAN sat on a bank where the road bends round Sheegus Height.

"Aw, now," said he, "but it's the sorraful wurl' when a fine young fella like meself has to lave his country an' go til a strange lan' fur to earn a livin'!"

"It is that," replied Conn Maguire.

"An' me willin' an' able til work, an' not a han's turn can I git til do. It's not right!"

"It is not."

The old man looked at the young man swiftly, and then turned away and looked out over the sea to where the Sligo mountains rise black and mistily to the sky.

"You wurn't wantin' to be goin', I'd be thinkin'?" he suggested.

"It's not me that 'ud go, if I cud help it. But sure, there's nathin' fur me here. I've no lan' or nathin'."

"An' what wud ye do fur a bit o' lan', Michael Halloran?"

"Sure, I'd run thrum here til Barnes Gap on

me han's an' knees widhout stappin', I'd be that eager til get it ! "

The old man turned and looked at Michael as he spoke. " Wud ye marry me daughter Ellen ? " he demanded.

Michael looked up at him in astonishment, and then laughed boisterously.

" Is it makin' fun o' me ye are ? " he said.

" I am not," replied Conn.

Michael rose to his feet and crossed to the old man's side. " It's a quare wurl'," he said, " an' the quare people in it ! "

" A'll not be stingy," said Conn.

" Ye'd need not to be. Sure, yer daughter's no catch, Conn Maguire. She is not in sowl ! "

" A'll give three cows til the man that marries her."

" They'd be well earned ! "

" Will ye take her if A give ye three cows wi' her ? "

" Aw, the cows are all right. It's the wumman ! She's oulder nor I am, an' she has the quare bad temper on her."

Conn made a gesture of contempt. " Och," said he, " wud a fine young fella like yerself let a wumman put him out ? You're the lad cud control her well. Wuddn't ye give her a clout on the ear if she was imperent ? "

" Aw, she's brave and handy wi' her fists her-

self. A saw her knock John Tanner flat on his back wance wi' wan blow. She's strong ! . . ."

"An' if she is, sure she's all the better able to help a man wi' a bit o' lan'. It's the fine worker she is, an' the quare han' wi' cows. There's none o' yer fine wimmen thrum the towns that cud houl' a candle to her wi' cows."

Michael shifted about a little, and then stooped and picked up a stone, which he flung carelessly at nothing in particular. "If a fella had three cows," he said, "he'd want a bit o' lan' til graze them on."

"Mebbe," replied Conn, "he cud sell wan o' the cows an' get a bit o' lan' out o' the Lan' Purchase."

Michael smiled cunningly. "Naw," he said, "he'd want til have three cows—he wudden want til sell any o' them for a while anyway. It's a bit o' lan' he'd be wantin' as well as three cows."

"Mebbe he cud borry a bit o' lan' at a low rent. Mebbe," went on Conn, "I'd be willin' til let him have the lend o' me medda beyant Harrison's farm fur a while."

Michael shook his head. "He'd be wantin' the lan' fur himself," he said, "an' wudden want til be beholdin' til no wan."

Conn moralised. "It's not well for a young fella til be full o' pride," he said.

"Cows must have grass," replied Michael, "an' ye can't have grass if ye haven't got lan'.

Yer daughter's no match be herself fur the like o' me."

They stood for a little while without speaking, the young man flicking the grass with his foot, the old man looking out over the sea and calculating in his mind how best to secure a husband for his daughter at a small price.

"Ye're very hard," he said in a tone which was intended to flatter the young man on his possession of a keen sense of business.

"A'm not hard," replied Michael, not displeased, "but ye'd need til git up brave an' early in the mornin' til git the better o' me."

"A'll give ye the three cows an' ye can graze them on the medda fur a year fur nathin'. . . ."

"A wudden take her at the price!"

The old man turned to go up the road as though all the bargaining were at an end. "Aw, well," he said, "A can't do better nor that, an' if ye don't like me terms ye'll have til go to America." He moved away a little. "It'll be a quare pity fur a fine young fella like you to have to go to a foreign lan' when there's a chance fur ye in yer own country."

"That's what A'm thinkin' meself."

"An' the chance when A'm dead o' steppin' intil me place."

"Sure, ye'll live a long time, Conn. Ye're a long-lived family. Yer ould mother's not dead yet, let alone you."

" Aw, ye nivir know ! "

" Naw, ye don't, an' ye shudden take no chances."

" A'll make me will the morra mornin', lavin' ivrything til you an' Ellen."

" Ye cud make another wan the day after."

" Aw, A wudden do that."

Michael kicked the life out of a dandelion. " Conn Maguire," said he emphatically, " if ye want til marry yer daughter til as fine a young fella as there is in this or anny other townlan' in the county Donegal, ye'll have to give me the three cows an' the medda beyant Harrison's farm. A cuddn't marry her fur less. God knows she's the sore wumman til look at, an' the temper o' her is enough til drive a man til the asylum. A'll be goin' til the shippin' agent's at Ballyshannon the morra mornin' til make arrangements fur me passage til America, an' A'd like til know now what yer intentions are. A wun't take her fur less."

" Ye'll be sure an' have her ? Ye wun't back out of it ? "

" Aw, A'll take her all right. Sure, wan wumman's as good as another if it comes to that, an' a wumman wi' cattle an' lan' is better nor one wi' nathin' ! "

" Ye're a hard man," sighed Conn, " but A'll do what ye want. Will ye come wi' me now an' see Ellen ? "

"Aw, sure there's time enough fur that."

"Mebbe, she'd like ye to come and see her. Ye nivir know wi' wimmen!"

"Man, ye must be quare an' anxious til git rid o' her," said Michael.

"Aw, indade, A'm not," replied Conn hurriedly. "Aw, no, A'm not. It wus herself made the suggestion. She wanted a man, she said, fur she's tired o' bein' an ould maid an' seein' all the young girls o' the place married aff an' no wan comin' anear her til ax her til do the same. 'There's young Michael Halloran,' ses she, 'that hasn't got much wit, God help him, but's a fine strappin' young fella! . . . It's aff til America he'll be soon if ye don't stap him. Affer him the three cows,' she said, 'an' he'll have me, the same young fella.' That wus what she said herself. It's not wantin' til git rid o' her that A am, but it's herself's wantin' til be married, an' God knows that's nacherl enough fur a wumman."

"Mebbe it is," said Michael.

"Ye'd better come an' see her," urged Conn.

"Aw, A'll not come now. Sure, there's no hurry. A want til have a bit o' dandher til meself. Tell her A'll come roun' the night an' coort her."

DERELICTS

A MAID came to the door and blew a cab whistle sharply ; and Ole George whipped up his horse and started off.

" Ain't no good you goin' ! " said the crossing-sweeper. " She on'y blew once. It's a taxi she wants."

" I s'pose I can 'eng about if I like, funny ! " retorted Ole George.

The crossing-sweeper shook his head. " Not much good doin' that," he said. " A taxi's sure to come up. On'y make you bad-tempered again, you know."

Ole George drove off to " 'eng " about in the hope that, should a taxi-cab not turn up soon, the would-be passenger would tire of waiting and would hire his " growler." " No 'arm in tryin', is there ? " he exclaimed, as the dilapidated horse made an effort to canter. Before he had reached the end of the street a taxi-cab, smart and clean, came quickly round the corner and took up the man and woman waiting on the steps of the house where the maid had blown the whistle. Ole

George pulled up sharply, with a sick look on his face. " Blast you ! " he said to the driver as the taxi-cab went by.

" Go 'ome an' die ! " was the reply he received.

" I tole you wot would 'appen," said the crossing-sweeper when Ole George returned to the stand. " It ain't no good you goin' . . ."

" I don't want no good advice, if you please. Not from you nor no one else ! "

" Well, I was on'y saying' . . ."

" Don't want to 'ear wot you was on'y sayin' ! Sick o' 'earin' wot you was on'y sayin' ! You get on wi' your crossin' an' leave me t' look after me own affairs ! See ? "

The old man dragged his broom towards the crossing. " Ain't much good my touchin' it," he said sadly. " These 'ere streets don't need much cleanin'. Too well made, they are. This job ain't 'alf wot it was ! "

Ole George snorted sympathetically. " No job is, from wot I can see of it. Too much bloomin' progress t' please me ! "

" Of course things is always goin' on, ain't they, George ? "

" Goin' on ! " Ole George's face was wrinkled in disgust. " Wot's the good o' things goin' on if people gets left be'ind, eh ? Awnswer me that, will you ? "

The crossing-sweeper wagged his head sagely. " Wot I'd like to know," he said, " is where this

progress is goin' to stop. That's wot I'd like to know." He waited for a reply, but Ole George made no response. " Mind you," he continued, " I'm all for progress myself. I don't believe in gettin' rusty. . . . On'y wot I want to know is, w'ere's it goin' to stop ? "

" Sime 'ere, old un," said Ole George, getting off the box-seat. "I don't earn me keep nah on a keb ! Strite, I don't ! Wot's the good o' progress t' me ? Oughta be a lor against it ! "

" O' course," said the crossing-sweeper, " these 'ere taxis do git about quickly, an' that ole 'orse of yourn . . ."

" 'Ere, down't sy nothink about the 'orse ! It ain't 'is fault any more'n it's yours or mine. See ? Dessay, if he could talk, he could say a few things about us. We ain't much t' speak of, are we, eh ? "

The crossing-sweeper was a mild-looking old man, with dim blue eyes and a short white beard trimmed in the traditional manner of a sailor's beard. One leg was a little shorter than the other, so that he limped.

" You're too bloomin' meek, you are ! " Ole George shouted to him. " That's wot's the matter wi' you. Take things lyin' down, you do. Git your livin' took away, an' say ' Thank ye ' for it. Mike me sick, people like you do ! "

" You ain't any better off for all your cursin'

an' swearin', are you? I've always been one for keepin' meself respectable. . . ."

Ole George kicked nothing with great violence. "Wot's the good o' bein' respectable if you ain't got no money, eh? Awnswer me that, will you?" The crossing-sweeper did not appear to be able to answer him that, so he devoted himself to sweeping the crossing with great vigour. "I tell you wot," continued Ole George. "We ain't clever, that's wot's the matter wi' us! Don't need us no more. See? Git out o' it! That's wot they sy to you after they've used you up, an' you can't do no more. Git out o' it! So 'elp me, wot a world!"

"No good complainin'. . . ."

"Give you the 'ump, things do!"

An old gentleman with two children passed over the crossing, and when they had done so the old gentleman handed a copper to each of the children so that they might give them to the crossing-sweeper.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed the crossing-sweeper; and they passed on.

"Go on," said Ole George, "show your bloomin' gratitood for tuppence!"

"The first I've 'ad to-day. . . ."

"Bit o' fat for you, eh?"

A whistle came from a block of flats. "There you are," he said, "another taxi! Down't nobody want a four-wheeler to-dy?"

The maid blew her whistle at regular intervals, but no taxi-cab came.

"You better go an' 'eng about," suggested the crossing-sweeper. "Taxis down't seem t' be in a nurry to come up."

"Naow," exclaimed Ole George, "I wown't go. Let 'er blow 'er bloomin' inside out if she likes!"

"You didden ought t' talk like that, you know. . . ."

"'Ow ought I to talk, then? Gow up there an' be turned off, an' sy, 'Ow, thank you, sir!' Eih?"

"You down't do no good by bein' abusive."

The whistle blew monotonously, but still no taxi came.

"'Ark at 'er! 'Ope she likes the toon!"

"It ain't 'er fault."

"It ain't no one's fault!"

There was a pause in the whistling, and then came sharply three calls. Ole George jumped at the cab.

"So 'elp me," he shouted, as he drove off, "I got a job at last!"

ADVENTURE

He climbed to the top of the tram-car, and sat down on the back seat. There was a certain grimness in his look, such as one sees on the face of a man who has made up his mind to do some work that is likely to be unpleasant.

"I shall go in," he said to himself, compressing his lips, "and if he says anything to me about it, I shall tell him straight out that I took a day off because I wanted to. See if I don't! That's what I'll tell him! I shan't lie about it!"

He reflected on the miserable spirit that would be shown by the other chaps were they in his situation. Morrison would be sure to snivel and say: "Please, sir, I've had a domestic bereavement!" and Green would stutter with nervousness, and say that he had had a bad headache, or that his wife had had another, and that he hoped they would overlook it this once. . . . Snivellers! None of that for him! He was human same's they were! He had impulses same's they had. . . . He remembered to have read somewhere that William Sharp once stayed away from the

bank in which he was employed, and when asked for an explanation had said : " I went into the country to hear the cuckoo call ! " Something like a man, he was. . . .

It was not as if he had ever done anything before. He hadn't ; but all the same he was human same's they were, and it was not human to go and work in a stuffy shop on a fine morning like yesterday was. What a fine day it had been ! The air was clean and clear even at Chalk Farm, and the trees were covered with young, green leaves, and the sparrows were making a devil of a jolly noise. . . . Well, could anyone blame him for turning away from the Holborn emporium to seek the joyfulness of Hampstead Heath ? Could they, now ? Of course they couldn't ! Not if they was human same's as he was ! If Toft, the shopwalker, beast that he was, said anything to him, he'd jolly well say something to Toft. Toft wasn't everybody, though he might think he was. Of course, they might sack him. . . . Well, what if they did ? He was human same's they were, and if they chose to sack a chap for being human—well, that just showed the sort of firm they were. He could get employment elsewhere.

Anyhow, yesterday was worth the risk of the sack. Jolly fine it had been. Of course, he couldn't explain why it was that he had gone to the Heath instead of to the shop. Must have been impulse. Just impulse. That was it. Impulse !

He had climbed to the top of a tram-car, and had paid his fare—three ha'pence, it was—and then the impulse came, and before he quite knew what he was doing he was off the car and walking towards the Heath. It was a pity about the three ha'pence. . . . And if he had gone to the shop, what would he have done? Put on a ridiculous frock-coat, its lapels full of pins, and spent the day selling stuff at two-three a yard to women who didn't seem to realise that he was human same's they were. Women! Huh! . . . He'd have had to help them to make up their silly minds. "We're selling quite a lot of this shade, madam!" or "I think you'll find this suit your purpose, madam!" or "Mmm! No-o, madam, I don't think that's quite what you want. This is more like it!" or "Shall I send it for you, madam? No trouble at all, madam. What name and address, please?" or "Anything else to-day, madam? No! Theng-cue!" *That* on a day, like yesterday! The smell of stuff at two-three a yard on a day like yesterday! . . .

He had stood on the Spaniards' Road, and had seen the pinnacles of City churches shooting up into clouds of smoke and mist. "Didden look bad, neither!" And had looked towards the little humpy hills at Harrow that seemed like cushions for the sky. He had thrown stones into the Round Pond, and had set a dog barking furiously, to the consternation of an elderly lady.

He had wandered round the ambling lanes, and had gaped at the cottage where Byron lived and the place where Keats heard the nightingale. He had seen a great blackbird . . . and then he had plucked whinblossoms, not without fear that he might be offending against the bye-law which forbade malicious injury to trees, shrubs, plants, etc.

"But it ain't malicious," he said to reassure himself.

He had crossed the horse-ride and had thrown himself down on a high grassy place, and had rolled about and slept and dreamt, and then rolled about and slept and dreamt again. He had helped three boys to catch tiddlers in the ponds beyond the horse-ride, and had learned much of the habits of that fish and the respective value of a plain tiddler and a tiddler with a red throat. . . . Clay had got on his boots and trousers and on his hands, and once he slipped on a wet bank, and his foot went into the water. The boys laughed, and he laughed too, and a girl who went by—a jolly girl, with long hair and bright eyes—laughed. Fine girl, she was. Looked nice! Not like the girls in the shop, white and yellow, and always got a headache. . . . He'd go up there again one day. . . .

He had spent a fabulous sum on his midday meal at "The Bull and Bush"; but then what was the good of doing a thing like that unless it

was done well? Might as well enjoy yourself proper! He had given twopence to the waiter! . . . And when the meal was over, no rushing back to the shop as if you hadn't got a minute to spare. He had strolled about the Heath quietly and comfortably, smoking a cigar that cost fourpence. It was a good cigar, too. He could tell that because the ash did not fall off for a long time. . . .

He remembered that he sat on a fallen tree for a while and watched some children playing cricket, and once he ran and fielded the ball for them, and they asked him if he'd like a turn at the wicket, and when he'd looked round to see if anyone was watching he took the bat . . . and was bowled first ball. After that he had wandered into the Garden Suburb, and had cocked a critical eye at the houses. Not bad, they weren't. He saw a girl in a floppy dress. . . . Of course, it was clever and all that, but floppy dress was not his style. He preferred the style of the girl who had laughed when he fell into the pond. Smart, she was. Her skirt fitted closely about her shapely limbs, and she had on a pair of fine silk stockings that you could see through. . . .

"That's what I call a girl!" he said to himself, as he thought of her. "I mean to say, that's a proper girl! . . ."

When he came out of the Garden Suburb he had wandered aimlessly but contentedly about. He

had found his way to the little zoo at Golder's Hill, and had seen the kangaroo jump in the oddest fashion. There were queer-looking birds there, all coloured, and deer that came and nosed in your hand. . . . He had walked into Golder's Park, and called for tea at the house that was formerly a mansion, but is now an eating-place. He sat there until the dusk came down, and then he walked about chi-iking a girl or two. . . . At supper-time he had gone home ; but he sat so long in his room thinking of the girl who had laughed when he fell in the pond that he forgot to go down to supper, and, rather than disturb Mrs. Carson, he went out to get something to eat. Chalk Farm had an ugly look last night, and it reeked ! He had suddenly become depressed and unhappy, and had had a strange inclination to cry. . . .

Well, all that took place yesterday. Now for Toft. Of course the firm would be wild when they knew, and, after all—well, he was human same's they were. Speaking strictly, he ought not to have stayed away from the shop. He was prepared to admit that. But there was an excuse for him. He hadn't had much of a life. . . . How would they like it, eh ? The stink of stuff at two-three a yard all day ! How would they like it ? If Toft began bullying him ! . . .

He entered the shop, and when he had taken off his outdoor coat, and put on his official frock-

coat, he prepared to enter his department. There was a heavy smell of carpet in the room.

"Co, what a fug!" he exclaimed to himself.

Toft eyed him severely.

"You didn't turn up yesterday!" he said, as if he were giving news. "How is that?"

"No, sir, I——"

"Eh?"

"The truth is, sir——"

"Well?"

"Please, sir, I wassen feelin' very well!"

"Oh! You ought to have sent a message. You know that, don't you?"

"Yessir! I'm sorry, sir!"

"Well, don't let it occur again—see!—or you'll hear more about it! Look sharp, now; we're very busy!"

"Yessir! Thank you, sir! I'm very sorry!"

"All right. Get to your counter, will you? There's a lot to do!"

"Yessir!"

"Of course, we shall stop a day's salary!"

He looked up at Mr. Toft. "Yessir," he said.

DISCONTENT

I CLIMBED to the top of Lurigedan, and while I lay there panting for breath, for God knows I am no climber, Murty came to me.

"It's a brave day!" he said in greeting.

"It is, indeed!" I replied.

He lay down by my side and gazed out towards the sea.

"But, sure, it'll not keep up," he said after a little while. "It'll be soft the morrow."

"How do you know, Murty?" I asked.

"It's the way it always is here. Brave an' fine one day, an' rainin' the next. Ye'll be goin' away soon?"

I nodded my head.

"On Saturday, mebbe."

"Yes, on Saturday, Murty."

He sat up and caught hold of his toes with his fingers, and swayed himself about for a few moments.

"It's well to be you," he said, "to be goin' over to Englan'."

"Why, Murty?"

"Ah, sure, ye see things there. It's the quare lonely place this to be stayin', an' you not seein' a livin' sowl thrum one day's end til another, barrin' the people ye see thrum the time ye're born til the time ye die, an' them not knowin' anny more nor yourself, God help them!"

"It's lonely everywhere, Murty," I said. "Lonelier in London than it is here." I told him how when I had gone to London first, a boy of sixteen, I had stood outside the Mansion House one Saturday and cried because there were six or seven million men and women about me and I did not know one of them. "Here you know everybody," I said.

"Ah, but you can see things in towns," he urged. "There's nathin' to see here on'y an ould sweety shop, an' McClurg's public-house, an' the long car comin' down the road wi' the mails. I'll not be stoppin' here once I get the chance to go away."

I said that I should have thought he would like to be a farmer, but he shook his head vigorously. "Norra bit o' me'll do that," he said. "There's nathin' to do here but work thrum the dawn o' day til the dark o' night, an' in the winter time it's that cowl' wi' the win' blowin' thrum the sea enough to blow the head aff ye that ye can't go out, an' have to be sittin' crouchin' over the fire, God help ye, to keep yerself warm. It's no life that for a man, but a life for a dumb baste

that has nathin' to do but ate the grass, an' lie down an' wait for the butcher to come an' take it til the slaughter-house. If ye wur to go into the village now, ye'd see the fellas lyin' up agin the curfew tower, wi' their han's in their pockets, an' nathin' at all in their heads but wonderin' what to do wi' themselves afore bedtime, an' not findin' no answer ! "

I became inept. "The reading-room," I suggested.

"Readin'-room ! " he exclaimed scornfully. "Sure, what's the good o' a readin'-room til annyone, wi' a lot o' ould papers in them ? Ye can't go into a readin'-room ivry night in the week. I never was in the one in Cushendall barrin' once, an' there was nathin' there but ould *Christian Her'lds*, an' religious papers that make ye sick to read them. The way they ram Jases down your throat is enough to send a man to the bad. I'll be off to the town as soon as I can ! "

I talked to Murty about rural depopulation and the land-hunger.

"Ah, people want land right enough," he said, "but it's a sore lonely life to lead workin' it." He stood up as he spoke and looked down into the valley. "Wud ye just look at ould Barney O'Hara down there," he said. He pointed to the fields lying at the foot of Lurigedan, and I rose and walked to his side. I saw an old man, very bent, binding hay.

" D'ye think I want to be the like o' that when I'm his age ? " said Murty. " He can't read or write, that ould lad, an' he knows nathin', an' he works that hard he's never had time to find annything out. All he can do is work his lan'. If ye talk til him about annythin' else, he gets moidhered. An' it's the way wi' all the men here. They can't enjoy theirselves because there's nathin' til enjoy. If I was in a town now, I woulden need to be goin' to bed at half-eight or nine because I'm tired o' doin' nathin'. Ye can go to a music-hall in a town for tuppence, an' hear all the latest songs, but ye never hear nathin' here except mebbe in the summer time when a visitor like yerself comes, an' then the songs is ould ! "

" Will you go to Belfast ? " I asked.

" No, I'll go to Glasgow. There's more value there."

" Do you know anyone in Glasgow ? "

" Ay, I have a brother there. My brother Ned. It was him toul' me Glasgow was better value nor Bilfast. It was him made the quare fool o' me one time when he was here over the head of a song I was singin'. Says he, ' That song's brave an' ould ! ' An' me on'y heard it a wee while afore he come ! "

" What does your brother do in Glasgow ? " I asked.

" He's a barman."

" And how long has he to work ? "

" He begins at eight in the mornin' an' he laves aff at eleven at night ; but sure he gets a half-holiday once a week, an' he has all day on Sunday, for they won't let you drink on a Sunday in Glasgow ; an' he goes til a music-hall ivry week, an' sometimes he goes til two in one day, for some places has two houses a night, an' you can do the two for fourpence in the gallery. That's cheap enough. It 'ud take more'n fourpence to give you pleasure in Cushendall ! "

" But, Murty," said I, " this is a finer place than Glasgow. This hill and the valley and the sea cannot be compared with Glasgow and your brother's foul-smelling public-house."

" Ah, what's the good of scenery in the winter time ? " he replied. " Ye get tired o' lukkin' at them all the year round. Ye want a change. In a town, now, ye get change. There's crowds o' people an' all the latest songs. . . . It's all very fine to talk, sir, but Ned doesn't want to come back here, an' I do want to get away oura this. That tells, doesn't it ? "

We stood there regarding the figure of Barney O'Hara as he patiently bound the bundles of hay, and I thought to myself how sad a thing it was that the boy by my side should long to fling himself into the unutterable hideousness of Glasgow out of the incomparable beauty of Antrim, and when I had thought that I turned to Murty and told him so.

"It's not sad at all," he replied. "Ye'd be wantin' the town yerself if ye were livin' here all the time. It's right an' easy to be talkin' the way you're talkin' when you on'y come for a trip, but ye'd be talkin' differ'nt, I can tell ye, if ye lived here all the year. Come on," he said suddenly, "an' I'll race ye down the grassy slope."

We half ran, half fell down the grassy slope, and in a short time we came to the field where Barney O'Hara was binding hay.

"That's a brave evenin'!" said Murty to the old man, as we ran by.

"Ay, it is," replied the old man without looking up.

"Ould footer!" murmured Murty as he ran on.

COMPARISON

He and I sat on a seat in Hyde Park, and watched the drift of fashionable folk go by. He was a small, neat man, with a pleasant, pale face and soft blue eyes, in which there was a whimsical, wondering look. His mouth was puckered up when I first saw him, but he was not whistling : he seemed to me to be exclaiming in astonishment. He gazed about him very eagerly ; he appeared to be unable to look at the fashionable folk too closely. Now and then, when some resplendent man or beautiful woman went by, his lips would pucker as if he were saying, " Oh ! " to himself ; and his eyes gleamed like those of a puzzled child. He turned and spoke to me quite simply, without self-consciousness, as if it were natural for two men who had never seen each other before to speak and be neighbourly.

" You can't get over it," he said, " they're nice-lookin' ! I mean to say, you can't 'elp lookin' at 'em. That young girl that jus' passed now, she was nice-lookin', wasn't she ? "

I looked at the retreating form of a tall,

dark girl, with slender limbs, and nodded my head.

"I don't mean to say she's beautiful," he continued. "Not what you'd call *beautiful!* But nice-lookin'! Eh? Walks nice, an' the way she talked, too! That was nice! An' 'er 'air, an' the way she was dressed! There's a lot of 'em about 'ere like that. Nice-lookin'! Got nice 'ands!——" He held out his hands, as he said this, and I saw that they were hard and rough and red; the nails were broken and distorted, and the knuckles were knubbly. He dropped his hands to his side, and laughed. "Not like mine, eh?" he said.

A boy went by, exquisitely tailored, and at his side was a girl of seventeen. She was smiling at something the boy said to her, and as she passed us, she put her hand up to her loose hair and flung it out so that it fell from her shoulder, and down her back. It was thick and brown, and it shone with beauty. I forgot the little man at my side, until I heard him speak again.

"Now, she's nice-lookin'," he said. "I mean to say she's real nice, she is! An' 'e was nice-lookin' too! Well-set-up young feller, I call 'im! Make a nice pair, they will! Shouldn't be a bit surprised if they 'it it off!" He remained silent for a few moments, and then began again. "I s'pose they bin to church together, eh? Yes, I expect so! They all go to church about 'ere!

You know! Church Parade they call this! Mind you, I don't blame 'em. You can't 'elp likin' 'em when you look at 'em! Nice-lookin' an' that! You know, I can't make it out! I mean to say, 'ow is it? They ain't wot you'd call beautiful—some on 'em downright ugly, but some'ow they're nice to look at. You know! Walks nice an' talks nice, and got nice 'ands!—I mean to say, look at me now! I'm not like them. I mean to say, if I 'ad the clothes they 'ave, I couldn't carry it off, you know. Look at my 'ands! Why, I couldn't wear gloves on 'em! An' I don't talk the way they do. An' walk! Well, I mean to say, it's silly to talk about it, ain't it? An' my wife, too!—She was nice-lookin' when I first knew 'er. Proper nice-lookin', she was! I mean to say she was as nice-lookin' as any 'ere, considerin'! Why, you wouldn't believe wot my wife was like when she was a young girl. You know! Jaunty, she was! Walked about like anythink, an' did 'er 'air nice, an' all that! But she ain't like it now, you know! I mean to say, she's all right, reely, only some'ow . . . That young girl we see jus' now with that boy, she'll be nice-lookin' when she gets to be my wife's age, same's she is now. Only older! That's all. She'll do 'er 'air nice, an' 'ave nice 'ands, an' talk nice. Don't matter wot age she is, she'll be nice-lookin'. Lots of old 'uns 'ere! Sixty if they're a day, some of 'em!

Only they don't look old ! Of course, they make 'emselves up a bit, but it ain't all that ! Even when they don't make 'emselves up, they look nice. You know wot I mean ! Now, my wife, she's not like that. She's not more'n forty, but she looks a good bit more. Don't seem to take no pride in 'erself. 'Er 'air—well, of course, it ain't to be expected, not with all she 'as to do ! I mean to say, it ain't reasonable to expect it. Only ! . . . Well, you know the way it is yourself ! I can't help thinkin' of wot she was like when I first knew 'er ! See ! Proper nice-lookin' she was ! An' that partic'lar ! "

The Park was crowded now, and the fashionable folk pressed close to us, as they went by. Beautiful women, beautifully clad, passed to and fro in an odour of fine perfumes. The little man drew his breath through his nostrils.

" That's nice, that is," he exclaimed. " I bet that cost a bit ! Did you 'ear the way their dresses rustle, eh ? Silk ! I often come 'ere of a Sunday mornin' an' spend a penny on a seat. Fair treat, I call it ! Of course, my wife she 'as to be cookin' the dinner, else I'd bring 'er, too. Do 'er good, it would. I mean to say it 'ud do anyone good. It's nice to see people lookin' nice ! Any'ow, that's wot I think ! I often say to 'er, if she was to try a bit more—only it ain't fair to say that. She ain't got the time ! Stands to reason she ain't. We've 'ad seven children.

Two of 'em dead, thank God! I don't mean to say I'm glad they're gone, only—well, you know yourself, they got the best of it, ain't they, now? An' it makes things a bit easier for 'er. It's a bit of a nandful, seven! An' the cookin' an' the cleanin' an' all that. You know, I don't wonder she don't take no pride in 'erself. I don't reely! I dessay she thinks I'm as bad as 'er. She 'ad nice 'ands, too. I mean to say she was very partic'lar about 'er 'ands. Rub lemons on 'em every night to make 'em white. An' glycerine! Ever 'eard of that? Keeps 'em soft an' white. She read about it in a paper. An' do the grate with gloves on. I often say to 'er if she'd only kep' it up, she'd be as nice-lookin' as any of 'em. But she didn't! An' I don't wonder at it neither. Not with wot she 'as to do. Only! . . . They do it all right. I mean to say their 'air don't get the way 'ers is! Mind, I'm not sayin' a word against 'er. She an' me's all right, you know. I don't mean to say we don't 'ave no words now an' again, but on the 'ole, we're all right. On the 'ole! Proper pals we are. I tell 'er all about this every Sunday. She thinks same as me about it. She's got too much to do. It ain't 'er fault, of course. I mean to say, she ain't to blame. An' it ain't my fault. Jus' can't be 'elped!"

The drift of fashionable folk had thinned, and the little man murmured something about having

to go. He gazed about him in the manner of one who is eager to take a last good look at treasured scenes, and then rose and stretched himself.

"I wouldn't miss comin' 'ere for anythink," he said, and added, "Good-day, sir!" and went his way.

THE BURIAL

THE funeral procession from the girl's home to the graveyard was due to begin at half-past two, but long before that hour the crowd of mourners began to collect. They stood about the entrance to the lane leading to the churchyard, and waited. The home of the dead girl faced the lane, and the procession, therefore, would reach its journey's end in a few moments from the time when it began to move. Townsmen and neighbours mingled with men from the country and the hills, and fishermen from the bay where the girl was drowned; and each man as he came up to a group of his acquaintances spoke of the terribleness of the disaster, and then the talk circled round the affairs of the small town.

John Mawhinney came along the old road to Ballyshannon, and when he was by the lane, he hailed James O'Hara.

"How're ye, James?" he said.

James O'Hara, a lean, foxy-looking man, turned at the sound of Mawhinney's voice. "Och, A'm

just middlin','' he replied. '' A've the quare cowl on me ! How is yourself ? ''

'' Ah, A'm not so bad. Man-a-dear, this is a tarr'ble sad thing about this young girl ! ''

'' Aye, it is that. Man, A mind her when she was that height, the same wee girl ! '' He allowed his hand to fall to the level of his knees as he spoke. '' An' a smart wee girl she was, too ! Aye ! She always had an answer for ye, whatever ye said, she was that sharp ! ''

He looked up as he spoke, and saw John McClurg approaching. '' Is that you, John ? '' he said.

McClurg, a large, moon-faced man, with little smiling eyes, came puffing up to them.

'' It is surely,'' he replied to O'Hara's greeting.

'' A saw ye in the market the fair day,'' said Mawhinney, '' but ye wurn't lukkin', an' ye didden see me. Did ye do well wi' yer cattle ? ''

'' Ah, A didden do so bad. A might 'a' done better, an' A might 'a' done worse ! ''

'' Did ye sell thon wee heifer ye had wi' ye ? ''

'' A did not. A wudden take the price——''

O'Hara tapped him on the arm. '' A s'pose ye come to the funer'l ? '' he said.

John McClurg glanced across the road to the door of the house where the dead girl lay. '' Well,'' he said, '' A thought A wud just dander into the town an' show me respect til the dead, God rest her sowl ! '' The three men raised their

hats at his prayer. "What time does it begin?" he asked.

"They wur talkin' about half-after-two," replied Mawhinney, "but A'm thinkin' it'll be later 'n that. Sure, the mail train's not in thrum Bilfast yet, an' there's fren's comin' thrum there an' thrum Derry, too, an' they'll be wantin' their denner when they git here. It'll be three o'clock afore iver they stir out o' the dure!"

"Aye, it will that," said James O'Hara, and then he turned and spoke to John McClurg. "Wur ye wantin' much for yer wee heifer?" he asked.

McClurg bit a piece of tobacco off a long twist of dark villainous stuff, and when he had chewed it in his mouth a while, he spat yellow juice over the kerb, and then said, "You might think A was wantin' too much, an' A might think meself A was wantin' too little!"

"A saw her meself," exclaimed Mawhinney, "afore she went intil the sea, laughin' an' jokin' like annythin'! Aw, God save us all thrum a death the like o' her death!"

"They wur a quare long time findin' her!"

"They wur."

"Wud ye be wantin' five poun's fur yer wee heifer, John McClurg?" said James O'Hara.

"A wud, indeed, an' a bit more on top of it!"

"They foun' her jus' where she went down," continued Mawhinney, in the voice of a man who

is reciting an oft-told tale. "Man, it's quare the way the body returns like that!"

"Aye!"

"Who's thon man wi' the tall hat an' the long coat on him, d'ye know?" asked one that stood by of Mawhinney, as a man in a frock coat knocked at the door.

"A nivir seen him afore," replied Mawhinney. "He's a stranger in this town, A'm thinkin'. D'ye know him, James?"

"A do not," replied O'Hara. "Mebbe he's come be the train. The mail's in now. Thonder's Patrick Magrath with the mail-car comin' roun' the corner!"

"Ye're mebbe right!" Mawhinney resumed the recital of his tale. "Did ye see the piece in the Derry paper about her?" he said. "Thon was the quare bit. An' there was a piece of portry be the young wumman in the post-affice!"

"Aye, A saw that. It was quare an' nice. A didden know thon wumman cud do the like o' that!"

"Ah, sure she's in Government sarvice, issen she? . . ."

"The paper said she was the quare, clivir, wee girl, an' tuk a lotta prizes at the school in Derry her da sent her to. They must 'a' spent a power o' money on her trainin'!"

"They did that. They nivir grudged her nathin'. It's a quare pity of them!"

"Aye, it only shows ye shudden make a god of yer childher! . . . ."

Two young men, one of whom carried a costly wreath in his hands, went up to the door, and presently were admitted to the house.

"Fur dear sake, luk at thon wreath!" exclaimed John Mawhinney. "Man, thon must 'a' cost somethin'!"

"Aye, it's thrum the young men at the Y.M.C.A. She was goin' to be married to one o' them. Did ye nivir hear about it?"

"Naw. What wus his name?"

"A think it wus young McCracken!"

"What! Thon lad?"

"Aye. It'll be a cut up for him, this! . . . John McClurg, will ye take six poun' ten for yer heifer?"

"Mebbe A wud if it was affered to me! . . ."

"There's manny a Cathlik would be willin' to give a wreath, too, A'm thinkin'!" said John Mawhinney.

"Aye, that's true enough. Sure, there's no room for bigitry where death is! . . . Wur ye thinkin' o' makin' me the affer, James?"

O'Hara walked a little way from the group, and then, squirting tobacco juice before him, returned to it. "Ah, A was just wondherin' if ye wud take it if it was affered t' ye. A wudden affer more'n five poun' for it meself! . . ."

"Ah, well, it wudden be no good you afferin'

that amount. A wudden part wi' it fur the money ! "

" There's a brave crowd here now," said O'Hara, turning towards the crowd. " It'll be a big procession, A'm thinkin' ! "

" It will that. But A've seen bigger. There was the time Dr. Cochrane died. D'ye mind that ? That was a procession an' a half ! "

" Aye, it was indeed. Near a mile long that was ! . . ."

The door of the house opened, and a number of persons entered.

" They'll be startin' soon," said Mawhinney.

" Ah, well, God help her, she'll soon be oura all this. It's the long sleep til the Day o' Judgment ! "

" Ye're right there. Ye are indeed ! . . ."

The door slowly re-opened, and men came forth bearing the yellow coffin on their shoulders. A great quietness descended upon the village street, and each man in it removed his hat and, if he were a Catholic, crossed himself and prayed for the repose of the dead girl's soul. Here and there a woman wrapped her shawl about her face, and wept. The bearers carried the coffin across the street to the lane leading to the churchyard, and the people in the street fell in behind, and marched slowly towards the grave. A bell tolled softly, and in the house from which the body had just been borne a woman was heard crying and lamenting.

"A'll give ye six poun's fur yer wee heifer," said James O'Hara, as the body went by.

"Ah, God rest her sowl!" murmured McClurg, marking himself with the sign of the cross on the head and breast. "A cudden take less nor six poun' ten!"

"A cudden give more nor six poun'! . . ."

"Well, ye'll not get it fur the price. It's six poun' ten or nathin'!"

"Ye're the hard man to bargain wi'! . . ."

"A'm not hard at all! . . . Mebbe, they're better dead young nor dead oul'!"

"Will ye not budge yer price?"

"A will not!"

"They're in the graveyard now. . . . Come on down til Maloney's public-house, an A'll sale the bargain wi' ye."

SAFETY

THERE were many terrors hidden in the heart of Mr. Timms ; but they all came from one dreadful thought. Supposing that one day he should be unable to work, what would become of him ? If he were to fall ill, or meet with an accident, or if his employers were suddenly to become bankrupt, what would become of him ? He would waken at night, crying out in fear because of some horrible dream in which he saw himself dismissed from the service of Messrs. Carlingford and Company for one reason or another. Sometimes it was because his accounts had become muddled ; and when he dreamt that dream, he invariably hastened early to the office and in a sort of delirium, went through his ledgers to make certain that they were in order, that the last figure had been entered, the last total calculated. At other times, he dreamt that old age had come upon him, and that his employers had, with regret, informed him that they required the services of a younger and more vigorous man.

In such dreams, they would say to him that he

had been a loyal servant and that they were very reluctant to part with him, but, they would add, competition was very keen, and the firms that survived had to employ the sharp-witted. They always regretted that their finances did not permit of a pension being paid to him, but they begged to be allowed to present him with the sum of twenty pounds and their good wishes for his future happiness. . . . From such dreams, Mr. Timms would awake in a sweat ; he would spring out of bed, and run swiftly to his mirror to see whether grey hairs had grown up like tares among wheat to destroy him. . . . If he were to meet with an accident or to become sick, Messrs. Carlingford and Company would probably continue to pay his salary to him for a few months. . . . They had been known to pay a salary to a man who was ill for six months. . . . But supposing Mr. Timms were to be unwell for more than six months ? Supposing he were to contract some incurable complaint ? . . . They could not be expected to continue paying a salary to him for the remainder of his life ! And then his savings would begin to shrink. And when they had gone ! . . .

What Mr. Timms feared most of all was that some day he might give way to his moods. At intervals, he had an extraordinary desire to seek adventures. Generally, these desires came at the end of each quarter when work was heaviest. He

would be sitting quietly at the desk at nine or ten o'clock at night, perhaps (for at the end of the quarter there was a great deal of overtime work), and suddenly, just when he was busy writing " E. and O. E." at the foot of an account, he would feel something inside him urging him to do the most preposterous things. The something would say, " Why don't you go out and enjoy yourself ? Go to a theatre or a music-hall or a concert or a public-house ! Do something to show that you are alive ! . . ." All of which was extremely silly ; for supposing he were to take the advice of the something inside him ! Supposing he were to go to the public-house, for example, and were to get drunk ! Well, that would be dreadful ! Mr. Carlingford might see him just at the moment he was reeling out of the public-house into the street ; and he might think that he was in the habit of getting drunk. . . . Supposing, too, he were to get drunk, he might get into trouble with the police. . . . Even if he were to escape the eye of Mr. Carlingford, and were not to get into trouble with the police, he would be certain to wake in the morning with a very bad headache. He might be tempted to lie in bed longer than was right, and so he should be late at the office, and a red line would be drawn against his name in the attendance book—a thing that had never happened, except on foggy mornings, during the whole of his career in the service

of Messrs. Carlingford and Company. Even if he were not so tempted, the headache would make him less able accurately and expeditiously to perform his work, and Mr. Carlingford might notice this. Mr. Carlingford would be sure to observe an error or a piece of carelessness in his work; much more likely, indeed, to do so in his case than in the case of Morrison, who frequently came late to the office and very often made mistakes. That was the penalty of being strictly accurate; an error was more noticeable than in the case of the careless. Mr. Carlingford would be sure to say, "Hilloa, Timms, what's this? A mistake! You're not up to the mark this morning! . . ." And then they would begin to make remarks, Mr. Carlingford and the Company, and shake their heads, and say, "Timms is getting on in years, or getting slack, or is less careful than he used to be. . . ."

That's what would come of doing anything so silly as was suggested by the thing inside him.

Mr. Timms was always able to point this out clearly to the thing inside him, but he was mightily afraid of it all the same; for he suspected that some day it might be too strong to be reasoned with. He remembered with alarm that on one occasion, when he was quite a young man, it had startled him out of his wits by suggesting to him that he should marry a very nice young person

who had been employed as a typist by Messrs. Carlingford and Company. It had carried him so far off his balance that he had actually spoken to her in office hours about matters that were not really relevant to the affairs of Messrs. Carlingford and Company. He shuddered when he thought that one afternoon the Company had come in quickly and unexpectedly and found him standing by Miss Gordon's side. Fortunately he had the presence of mind to take up a batch of bills, and pretend to be explaining them to her; but he received such a shock that he had never ventured to talk to her quite so carelessly again. Once he had taken Miss Gordon to tea, and they had talked for a long while about the office. Then Miss Gordon had invited him to her home, and she and her mother (for she was fatherless) had talked so long about the office that it had grown late, and so they asked him to stay to supper. Then, one Saturday, he asked Miss Gordon if she would care to go to a theatre with him, and she had said she would. They went to see a thing called "Iolanthe," which he could not help thinking was somewhat foolish; but Miss Gordon said it was awfully nice, and that the girl who played the part of Iolanthe was awfully nice. She had said she was awfully fond of Gilbert and Sullivan, the gentlemen, he discovered from the programme, who were responsible for "Iolanthe." She had seen several of their

pieces, and liked them awfully much : she thought they were all awfully nice ; and her mother thought so too. . . .

He took her to tea at a tea-house in the Strand, and when they separated, she told him that she thanked him very much, and that she had had an awfully nice time.

He remembered it so well. He had gone home that evening feeling that a life passed continually in the society of Miss Gordon would be very pleasant. He remembered distinctly the sense of loneliness he had had as he ascended the stairs of the lodging-house in Camberwell where he lived ; how dingy his bed-sitting-room had seemed, and how tasteless and sloppy Miss Squibb's food was. The thing inside him kept saying, " Risk it, man, risk it ! Two can live as cheaply as one. Risk it, man, risk it ! " He had finished the repulsive food provided by Miss Squibb, and then had gone into the street again. He remembered that he walked aimlessly about, listening to the thing inside him saying, " Risk it, man, risk it ! " until, to his amazement, he found himself standing outside the door of Miss Gordon's home. His hand was raised to the knocker, when suddenly he said to the thing inside him, " But supposing I were to lose my job, or fall sick or something, what would become of me with a wife and perhaps children ? " And his hand had fallen away from the knocker, and he had turned and fled back to

the dingy bed-sitting-room that he hired from Miss Squibb. . . .

Miss Gordon went away from the office of Messrs. Carlingford and Company soon after that, and he never saw her again. He remembered that he had taken her hand as she went out of the office on the last day of her engagement, and that he said " Good-bye " to her, and wished her good luck. He remembered that she had looked up at him for a moment or two, with a queer, questioning look in her eyes, and that she had stood in silence as if she were waiting for him to say something else. And then she had gone away. . . . He supposed she had married. Perhaps she was dead ! . . .

That was the kind of thing the thing inside him was always urging him to do. Morrison had married, and Morrison was poor. Of course, Mr. Timms, too, was poor ; but that was not the point. Morrison was harassed ; Morrison's wife was always ill, or one of the children was ill, or something or other. Then one of the children died. . . . Of course, he was very sorry for Morrison when that happened, but he could not help thinking how fortunate he was to be spared all that trouble. When he reflected on the approach of old age and disaster, he was comforted to some extent by the thought that such things would be worse for Morrison than they were likely to be for him.

One day, a junior clerk in the office, a very nice young man by the name of Cook, pitched his pen on the face of a clean page of a ledger, and swore horribly. "I'm fed up with this life!" he said, and, swinging himself off his desk, he went to the coat-peg and began to put on his coat and hat.

"But it's not lunch-time yet," said Mr. Timms to him wonderingly.

"I know that," Cook replied. "I'm off. I'm going to Canada, or hell, or somewhere out of this! I'm sick of clerking!"

Mr. Timms had asked questions about Canada. Had Cook any friends there? Had he been promised, definitely promised, employment there? What prospects had he? To his horror, Cook answered that he had not any friends in Canada, that he had not any definite or indefinite promise of work there, and that his prospects were nil.

"But it's madness," he urged, "to throw up a fairly safe job for a risky thing like Canada!"

"You've got to take risks sometimes," said Cook obstinately.

"Wait till you're older," replied Mr. Timms, "and you'll know better."

And then Cook had said a remarkable thing. "Yes, I know," he answered gloomily. "They always say that, and then when you're old you're too cowardly to know better!"

Mr. Timms was too busy trying to understand what this meant to notice that Cook had gone off, and it was not until Mr. Carlingford called for the young man that he realised what had happened.

"Where's Cook?" Mr. Carlingford demanded angrily, for he had been kept waiting a long time, a minute or so.

"I think he's gone to Canada, sir!" replied Mr. Timms.

"To where?" exclaimed Mr. Carlingford.

Mr. Timms explained what had happened.

"Are his books all right?" said Mr. Carlingford; and when he had been reassured, he nodded his head, and went back to his office. "Silly young ass!" he said.

Cook had written to Mr. Timms some months afterwards, and had stated that he was getting on well. "It was rotten at first," he wrote, "but this is worth it! Why don't you come, too?"

Mr. Timms replied to Cook's letter, and stated very precisely that it would be absurd to give up a comparatively safe post for a positively uncertain thing. It had happened that Cook had succeeded, but there was no guarantee that he, Timms, would also succeed. He was older than Cook. . . .

Then the dreadful thing happened. Messrs. Carlingford and Company became bankrupt, and

Mr. Timms was without employment. In a kind of desperation, he tramped from office to office in search of work, but always he was told that a younger man was required. He would go home in the evening and calculate the amount of his savings. He quitted the house of Miss Squibb, and took a cheaper lodging. He estimated the number of weeks he could live on a pound a week without work, and found that his savings would suffice for a year and a half. After that ? . . . He became frenzied when six months had gone by, and he was still unemployed. He tried to live on less than a pound a week, and he removed to a still cheaper lodging. One day he felt a curious pain, and he ran desperately to a doctor. "If I don't take care of myself," he said, "I may be unable to look for work at all, and then what will become of me ?" He went into the doctor's surgery, and sat down in the waiting-room to wait his turn. He fingered the pages of an old illustrated paper that was lying on the table, and found himself getting confused over a picture of stalactites and stalagmites that some one had found in a fearful cave in Africa. "Queer things," he was muttering to himself, when the doctor summoned him to him. . . .

He came out of the surgery with a smile on his face. The lines about his mouth and eyes seemed to have been rolled out. His nervousness and alarm had gone, and in their place was calm. He

glanced about him fearlessly, and when he said "Good-day" to the doctor, he said it jauntily.

"Plucky chap, that!" said the doctor, as he shut the door behind him.

"Thank God!" said Mr. Timms, "Oh, thank God, I'm safe now!"

And in three months he was dead.

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